

Socrates' Political Science: Theory and Practice,
A Study of Socrates' Methods in Plato's *Gorgias* and *Apology of Socrates*

by

Anthony Michael Maratea

A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Approved April 2022 by the
Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Colleen Sheehan, Co-Chair
John Doody, Co-Chair
Catherine Zuckert

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2022

ABSTRACT

In this essay, I explore a claim that Socrates makes in Plato's *Gorgias* where he professes to be the only true practitioner of the political art in Athens, the only true statesman. I argue that the *Gorgias* enables readers to have a greater understanding of how Socrates conceives his own purpose and relationship with Athens as a practitioner of the "true science of politics" as he calls it and as a skilled user of what he develops as the "true art of rhetoric." This ennobling art of rhetoric, which Socrates professes to be a practitioner of, is opposed to the sycophantic and flattering art propagated by Gorgias and others. Furthermore, I argue that the view of rhetoric and politics that Socrates develops in the *Gorgias* serves as a foundation for his actions and statements in the *Apology of Socrates*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would especially like to thank the constant commitment of my fiancée, Jennifer Hartig who helped me see this entire project through to the end by her charity and love. I owe an immense debt of gratitude to the donors who made the Cook Family Scholarship and the Harry V. Jaffa Fellowship in Political Philosophy available to a mere schoolteacher, and I will be forever grateful for their generosity and magnanimity. Without their aid and support, this project would not have been even remotely possible. I wish to also thank my professors in the Classical Liberal Education and Leadership program for pushing me along the way to clarify my thoughts and for their modeling of exemplary teaching of great texts. I am exceedingly proud to say that I have improved as a scholar, student, and teacher due to their unsurpassed dedication. Learning from them has been nothing short of a dream. Finally, I would like to express my sincerest thanks to Dr. Catherine Zuckert for all of her guiding conversations through difficult texts, patient comments on numerous drafts, and helpful discussions throughout my time at SCETL.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	v
CHAPTER	
1 SETTING THE STAGE: WHY DOES SOCRATES TALK TO OTHERS?.....	1
2 INTRODUCTION: GORGIAS CONTRA SOCRATES	5
3 SOCRATES' DEFENSE: ON THE DIFFICULTY OF PERSUADING THE ATHENIANS.....	9
4 SOCRATES' DEFENSE: A QUESTION OF PURPOSE	11
5 HOW SOCRATES BECAME HATED.....	15
6 SOCRATIC REORIENTATION OF KNOWLEDGE.....	17
7 THE NOBILITY OF SOCRATES	19
8 WHAT DID THE APOLOGY OF SOCRATES ACCOMPLISH?.....	21
9 TEXTUAL ECHOES I: CHAEREPHON, SOCRATES' YES-SAYING DAIMONION	22
10 TEXTUAL ECHOES II: THE ROLE OF TRIALS IN THE GORGIAS	26
11 THE GORGIAS: HOW DOES SOCRATES UNDERSTAND RHETORIC?..	30
12 WHAT IS THE ART OF RHETORIC? SOCRATES' EXCHANGE WITH GORGIAS.....	32
13 WHAT IS THE PROPER FUNCTION OR USE OF RHETORIC? SOCRATES' EXCHANGE WITH POLUS	38
14 WHY SOCRATIC PHILOSOPHY CONSTITUTES THE TRUE SCIENCE OF POLITICS	44

CHAPTER	Page
15	CALLICLES' VIEW OF CONVENTIONAL AND NATURAL JUSTICE 50
16	CALLICLES' VIEW OF PHILOSOPHY AND THE PHILOSOPHIC LIFE .. 53
17	SOCRATES: THE TRUE ORATOR AND TRUE POLITICAL SCIENTIST. 64
18	CALLICLES' CONFUSION ON SOPHISTRY AND ORATORY..... 72
19	SOCRATES ON SHAME AND ANGER..... 74
20	CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON PLATO 76
REFERENCES	78

PREFACE

Herein, I present my thoughts on the relationship between Plato's *Apology of Socrates* and his *Gorgias*. I began this project with the simple intention of coming to a better understanding of Plato's *Gorgias* after learning that the dialogue had absorbed the attention of Leo Strauss in his final years of teaching at St. John's College. While teaching a course on the *Gorgias* there, Strauss had been writing a chapter on Plato's *Gorgias* which was to be the culminating chapter in a series on Plato in his *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*, commencing with the *Apology* and *Crito*, and then the *Euthydemus*, followed by his thoughts on the *Gorgias*.

At SCETL, we emphasize a study of political philosophers and statesmen to attempt to come to terms with the lasting human problems and questions with which we are beset. It is not our goal to find answers to our current problems strictly by looking for past solutions, but, rather, the past problems can help us to ask better questions for our own times. Socrates, then, is an ideal figure for us to examine, as he makes the claim in Plato's *Gorgias* to be a statesman of the highest caliber, greater than even the likes of Themistocles and Pericles, figures he claims have left Athens in a corrupted state. Yet for all of his claims of benefitting the city, Socrates was found guilty by his fellow Athenians on the charges of (1) corrupting the young, (2) not believing in the city's gods, and (3) introducing new gods (24c).

Upon reading and re-reading the *Gorgias*, I was struck by the consistent allusions to trials, both to Socrates' own fate and to conceptions of justice that recur throughout the work. But what was striking most of all was a formulation that Socrates makes towards the end of the work, where he claims to be the true practitioner of the political art.

Knowing the fate of Socrates, I at first found this statement to be a deeply ironic or sarcastic one; but, upon further reflection, I began to realize the brilliance of it.

In the *Gorgias* set in 405 BC, Socrates predicts how a case of his magnitude would fare, wherein he declares that he would be convicted in an overwhelming landslide, and his trial would be akin to a doctor accused by a pastry chef tried before a jury of children. In his *Apology*, just six years later, in 399 BC, Plato depicts Socrates interacting with the city of Athens directly, and, for the first time in his 70 years of life, Socrates must establish an account of himself that is comprehensible to the *polis*. Socrates acknowledges repeatedly that persuading Athens of his beneficial nature will be a difficult task.

It may be a quaint platitude to say that all Socratic dialogues of Plato function as defenses of Socrates and the Socratic life, but I argue that this statement is no less true of the *Gorgias* than it is of Plato's *Apology of Socrates*. For in the *Gorgias*, Plato has Socrates confronted by Callicles who makes the strongest criticisms of Socratic philosophizing by arguing that it leads to the greatest likelihood of harm for Socrates from the political community and that Socrates should move on from the *study of philosophy* to the *activity of politics*. Plato in his work attempts to offer a corrective to our understanding of Socrates, for the image and meaning behind Socrates had been misunderstood in his own time so thoroughly. The *Gorgias* along with the *Apology* sheds light on the multiple sources of this misunderstanding and they function as panaceas to our collective ignorance. Plato begins his *Protagoras* with a comic misunderstanding which highlights a very real and dangerous misconception: Socrates has a door slammed in his face on the presupposition that he is a sophist.

Popularly understood, Socrates' mode of questioning the opinions of others is done merely to 'trip others up' in a sophistic sense – this is Callicles' account of Socrates' method of discussion whereby he refutes those who base their opinions on nature by using examples from convention and vice versa. Socrates' activity of removing bad opinions from others is often fundamentally misunderstood by both his interlocutors and young students alike, fictional and otherwise. His cadre of leisured youths follow him not out of philosophic desire, but, rather, as a source of entertainment: "they enjoy hearing men examined who suppose they are wise, but are not. For it is not unpleasant," Socrates tells us (33c). Even his close friend, Crito, seems to be at odds with Socrates on fundamental philosophical questions regarding justice and injustice, and Socrates' closest companions, Plato excluded, do not seem to understand his final speeches in the *Phaedo*, and they mourn for the husk of Socrates. Thus, we can forgive those who seemingly misunderstand Socrates, as Plato has shown his closest and deepest allies also misunderstood him. How then are we to understand Socrates as Plato understands him?

Socrates introduces in the *Gorgias* a paradox that the most politically beneficial life is the life least engaged in politics as popularly understood. Socrates' claim to be the only true politician is a well-founded one in that he *does* actively work to make the souls of those he interacts with better. Thus, the *Gorgias* provides the rational foundation for the manner of speaking that Socrates delivers in his defense speech. With this understanding of Socrates, we should then always approach the texts with the following question in mind, how is Socrates making this specific individual better? How then is Socrates so much more than just a sophist?

It is Plato's task in the Socratic dialogues to depict Socrates in a way that will make him both comprehensible to those who would follow his way of life, potential philosophers, and make philosophy safe for all cities. In this regard, both the *Gorgias* and the *Apology* emphasize the differentia of Socrates. Plato in his re-creation of Socrates stresses the positive connections that he has to democracy and democratic Athens. Thus, at the heart of his defense in the *Apology* we find Chaerephon, the loyal democrat, as the connection between Socrates, Athens, and Apollo. For it is Chaerephon who asks the now famous question, is there anyone wiser than Socrates? Similarly, Chaerephon serves as a connecting figure at each major junction in the *Gorgias*. Chaerephon's support and sacrifice for democratic Athens lends a positive, democratically-responsible portrayal of Socrates.

It is in the *Gorgias* where Socrates provides his most elaborate treatment of publicly-minded rhetoric. He establishes that as it is currently used, it amounts to little more than flattery, for it is persuasive non-didactic speech which corrupts rather than improves. Furthermore, it is not a science that can give a rational account of itself or the goods it provides. Socrates, though, makes an attempt to rehabilitate rhetoric into an ennobling science of improvement – a science that could reinforce the true science of politics, which Socrates understands as the art of making citizens better.

It is my contention that Socrates practices this sort of ennobling science, and that he attempts to better Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles throughout the course of their conversation together. In brief, Socrates attempts to restore justice and a sense of decency in Gorgias' soul by revealing the true dangers that his teaching produces. When Socrates discusses the proper ends of rhetoric with Polus, he attempts to give Polus a greater

insight into good human action by revealing to him the true shamefulness of performing unjust deeds rather than suffering them, and Socrates also guides him away from collapsing all that is pleasurable with all that is good. Finally, in responding to his greatest adversary, he helps Calicles see his own deeply-rooted, yet unacknowledged, attachment to justice. Socrates acts in a truly philanthropic way by providing therapeutic speeches to the souls of his interlocutors.

In both the *Gorgias* and the *Apology*, Socrates defends why the philosophic life is only life worth living. The philosopher cares deeply about virtue and about tending the souls of others. This requires understanding the souls of others and to know the good in order to see what needs to be done to help that individual. As Plato has shown, this dedication is dangerous because it requires Socrates to reveal to others their deficiencies, which is simultaneously humiliating and infuriating. Socrates infuriates the jury by revealing their own lack of care concerning justice. He reminds them of times when other citizens of Athens abused the court of justice by pleading for mercy through underhanded means where they paraded their children before the court or wept publicly in a dramatic display designed to secure an unjust acquittal.

Socrates' sacrifice at the hands of the jury is noble and ennobling. Socrates refuses to debase justice, and, instead, he seeks to serve as an example for others by demonstrating the proper stance one should take towards justice and improvement. He does not shy away from the accusations, but instead faces them with courage. Teaching the audience that philosophical inquiry does not lead to injustice, but, rather, a greater appreciation and love for justice. By doing so, Socrates makes philosophy safe for Athens and for all political communities. Contrary to Gorgias, and his *Encomium of Helen*,

where he defends Helen of all culpability, Socrates embraces the responsibility he has had on his community and the positive influence he has provided, thus making him the rightful inheritor of the Prytaneum's benefits, as he truly makes others better.

Socrates' influence in this regard is not just limited to Athens. For Plato has enabled all individuals to benefit from Socrates' questioning by making him immortal through text, thus it is true that Socrates is the true political scientist and the greatest statesman for he has promoted the greatest degree of improvement in the souls of others by reminding his readers to talk about virtue every day and to make their souls as excellent as possible. We must though be willing to undergo the Socratic treatment, by reading these texts with care and by allowing Socrates to peer into our souls.

CHAPTER 1

SETTING THE STAGE: WHY DOES SOCRATES TALK TO OTHERS?

In a recent collection of articles on Plato's Socrates titled *Socrates in the Cave: On the Philosopher's Motive in Plato*, editors Paul Diduch and Michael Harding set out to address the challenge of Socrates' "self-presentation and self-understanding" (Diduch 4). As a point of departure, the editors take inspiration from Socrates' discussion with Glaucon in *Republic* 519e-520d. Here Socrates claims that it is not the "concern of the law that any one class fare exceptionally well, but [that the law rather] contrives to bring [happiness] about in the city as a whole, harmonizing the citizens by persuasion and compulsion," and ultimately "making them share with one another the benefit that each is able to bring to the commonwealth" (Allan Bloom's translation quoted by Diduch with my own slight contextual clarification added). Kallipolis engages in illiberal civic organization for the sake of the happiness of the whole. As the editors are quick to point out, however, Socrates makes space for his own freedom in Athens in the sequel, contra the portrait of the philosopher just developed:

We'll say then when [philosophers] come to be in other cities *it is fitting for them not to participate in the labors of those cities*. For they grow up spontaneously against the will of the regime in each; and a nature that grows by itself and doesn't owe its rearing to anyone has justice on its side when it is not eager to pay off the price of rearing to anyone... (520a-b, emphasis mine)

They conclude that "Socrates himself, in contrast to his portrait of the philosopher, is admitting implicitly that he does not owe a debt to his own regime and, thus, that there is no obvious civic or even moral necessity for him to 'go down' with Glaucon and help the

brothers fend off the teachers of injustice” (Diduch 4). Diduch and Harding have in their sights a distinctly modern prejudice which obscures our interpretation of Plato, our “presumption in favor of democratic enlightenment” (4). What could be called our desire for philosophical philanthropy is summarized in the following manner: “On this view, one simply assumes that the philosopher, Socrates included, returns to the shadows to liberate others from their mental captivity—that this is somehow his duty or the moral responsibility of the genuinely wise” (4). “Socrates’ own remarks,” in the *Republic*, “urge us to suspend and interrogate this conclusion” (4). What then is Socrates’ way of life? What does Socrates say he is ‘up to?’ Diduch and Harding first posit turning to Socrates’ own “biographical remarks” found in the *Symposium*, *Phaedo*, *Apology*, and *Theaetetus*, where Socrates posits the following motives for his conversations: erotic desire, deficiencies of natural science, a divine command to “justify his ignorance and vindicate virtue,” and to serve “others by delivering their wisdom” as “an intellectual midwife” (4). This list merely serves to exemplify some of the possible Socratic motives and is in no way exhaustive. “Plato deliberately leads the reader in various and ostensibly incompatible directions” (4-5). “The ultimate interpretive challenge,” Diduch and Harding tell us, “is to weave these strands together, to assemble Socrates’ intellectual biography, to articulate his self-understanding, and to match it with his deeds” (5).

According to Diduch and Harding, “[n]early all scholars of Plato resolve for themselves the question of Socrates’ motives in one of three ways” (5). Camp one consists of understanding Socrates as being “motivated by the god, the divine voice, or a general concern for virtue, to carry out a moral-philosophical mission,” or as I will call it, the philanthropic motivation. Camp two entails a belief that “Socrates is motivated by

the promise of advancing his own wisdom or knowledge to undertake his various dialectical refutations,” a knowledge-hungry Socrates. The final camp is composed of those who craft a “coherent amalgam of the above, though in most cases motive 1 or 2 predominates” (5). The task of gathering Socrates’ words with his deeds is what I will intend to do by comparing two such works which seem to depict conflicting motives for Socrates, Plato’s *Gorgias* and his *Apology of Socrates*. Furthermore, I believe a thorough comparison of the character of Socrates as presented in Plato’s *Gorgias* and in the *Apology* reveals Socrates to be engaged in philanthropic and therapeutic conversation for the sake of his interlocutors’ souls.

The *Gorgias* and the *Apology* mirror each other in peculiar ways. For instance, the trial of Socrates is retold repeatedly and alluded to throughout the *Gorgias* with differing degrees of accuracy, taking the form of a dreadfully serious threat to a farcical account of a pastry-chef prosecutor bringing charges against Socrates, the doctor, before a jury of children. and the final eschatological myth of the *Gorgias* ends with a perfectly just trial, something Socrates asserts he has been denied in the *Crito*. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates also prophesies how his trial will fair. Clearly, then, Plato asks us to contemplate the *Gorgias* in light of his *Apology*.

Throughout his *Gorgias*, Plato distributes language related to courts, trials, and judgments using the images in both comic and serious senses, and trial imagery is used repeatedly in each conversation with Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates thoroughly denies the goodness of conventional rhetoric while simultaneously outlining the principles of an ennobling, true rhetoric. Furthermore, in the penultimate section of the *Gorgias*, Socrates makes a bold assertion to possibly be the only true

practitioner of the political art. This amounts to claiming expertise in deliberative arts along with an implicit claim to knowing what is just. Socrates does so along with denigrating the likes of Pericles and Themistocles, household figures of Athenian statesmanship. What light does Socrates' claim reveal about his own relationship with Athens?

I think that with a few Athenians—so as not to say myself alone—I put my hand to the true political art and I alone of the men of today practice politics, inasmuch as it is not with a view to gratification that I speak the speeches that I speak on each occasion, but with a view to the best, not to the most pleasant. (521d-e)

What then does Socrates understand the political art to be and what is the foundation for his claim to superiority?

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION: GORGIAS CONTRA SOCRATES

Plato's *Gorgias* is ostensibly about the art of rhetoric and its application in the *polis* for the sake of power. Socrates denies that rhetoric is a useful science at all in the conventionally understood way, but, rather, rhetoric is a skill which imitates something noble, the judicial art. Socrates goes on to define and articulate his own understanding of what he calls true rhetoric which would aid in the pursuit of the true political art. It is in the *Gorgias* where we find the most detailed defense of the philosophic way of life pitted against the life of politics as understood by Callicles, Polus, and Gorgias. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates makes the claim to be the only true practitioner of the political art in the sense that he does not speak to others "out of any desire to please, but with a view to what is best rather than what is most pleasant" (521d). In only one dialogue, the *Apology of Socrates*, does Socrates come closest to having a conversation with the city as a whole, a task where sycophantic rhetoric as understood by Socrates would be most effective and his own style of conversation least effective. Socrates' method of conversation cannot work with large groups, for Socrates' conversational method functions similarly to how his judges in the eschatological myth at the end of the *Gorgias* are able to judge the dead by "looking with the soul itself at the soul itself [of the judged]," i.e., in a one-on-one situation (523e). Socrates, however, refuses to use sycophantic rhetoric in order to escape unjust punishment. Why does Socrates refuse to use this sort of rhetoric? Does he attempt to make his fellow Athenians better, and is this his civic understanding? Is Socrates the embodiment of the ideal 'good orator,' as described in section 504d-e? How are we to

take seriously his claim to be the only true politician or, for that matter, his claim to be a divinely-sent gadfly?

Devin Stauffer argues in his “Socrates and Callicles: A Reading of Plato’s *Gorgias*” that Socrates’ defense of philosophy and his attack against the political life serves as “a quasi-public defense of his own way of life” (651). In doing so Stauffer argues that “Socrates is presenting a vision of his life that has become well known through Plato’s *Apology of Socrates*,” and Stauffer hears in the conjured-up interlocutor a voice “very similar to Callicles...who accuses him of living a shameful life because he is unable to protect himself” (652). While the account that Socrates provides in the *Apology* has “shown great power to move readers and inspire admiration of Socrates,” the *Gorgias* “leads us to wonder whether this presentation, inspiring as it is, gives us the most accurate picture of Socrates’ true views” (653). Strikingly in Stauffer’s reading of the *Gorgias*, “the dialogue quietly raises questions about the status of the central principle of Socrates’ defense—the extreme pro-justice view—in Socrates’ own mind” (653). For Stauffer sees Socrates willfully supplant justice with moderation, detailing “moderation as the virtue from which all the other virtues are derivative, since he describes the good man’s concern for his own moderation as the source of his justice, courage, and piety” (653). Stauffer acknowledges that his view is “unorthodox,” and he sees in Socrates’ exchange with Callicles the greater attempt for Socrates to obscure what he believes. Instead of sharing his own views, “Socrates does what he can to encourage Callicles to acknowledge his better self and his deepest beliefs, and to restore his commitment to justice” (655). While I cannot say that I am wholly convinced by Stauffer’s

interpretation, I agree with Stauffer's claim that in the *Gorgias* "a public presentation of philosophy that is more rhetorical than philosophic" is presented (656).

Socrates targets Gorgias for the very reason that Gorgias supplies people with ready-made answers to questions that Socrates understands to be the most important, such as what is the best life? Gorgias sees all elements as settled. From Socrates' perspective, the quest for the good life is something that remains unending and the pursuit of such a life dedicated to virtue is what Socrates seeks to promote in Athens. He seemingly wants the Athenians to live up to their namesake, Athena, a goddess of both wisdom and courage. But this does not remain Socrates' only goal, for it seems that he also attempts to protect philosophy not just from Athens, but for all cities. Socrates' rhetoric of his defense depicts the philosophic life as ultimately harmless and law-abiding. Gorgias' position leads to a settled life of apparent comfort established through injustice and ill-begotten power, whereas Socrates exemplifies the restless pursuit of wisdom.

By interacting with Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles, Socrates is able to help each gentleman discover his own intellectual shortcoming or stumbling block on his path to virtue, revealing to each how they currently live in a contradictory manner to the good life. In the process, Socrates offers reforms for the use of the art of rhetoric, the science of politics, and clarifies why his own way of life is superior to all others. Through the various references and allusions that are made to trials, judges, and justice, Plato's *Gorgias* appears to offer itself as a companion piece to the *Apology*, wherein it provides a complete account of Socrates' view of rhetoric and the ideal statesman. It is my

contention that the *Gorgias* comprises Plato's attempt to provide a rigorous foundation for Socrates' mode of speaking in his *Apology of Socrates*.

CHAPTER 3

SOCRATES' DEFENSE: ON THE DIFFICULTY OF PERSUADING THE ATHENIANS

Plato portrays the peril Socrates faces before the jury of Athenians in his *Apology of Socrates* in a comical manner toward the beginning of his *Protagoras*. In the beginning of that dialogue, Socrates intends to meet the great sophist Protagoras, who happened to be staying at Callias' house. This is the same Callias who is referenced in the *Apology* by Socrates himself when Socrates recounts a story where he asks Callias which person he would seek out as a teacher to see his sons properly raised in the virtue of the "human being and the citizen" (20a-b). In the *Protagoras*, Socrates knocks on Callias' door only to be greeted by a surly doorman who on first appearance takes Socrates to be a sophist, "'Oh great, some sophists! [Callias is] not free,' and with that, using both hands, he slammed the door very energetically, as hard as he could" (314d). Socrates knocks again and gains entry only after he proclaims that he is not in fact a sophist himself, but that he is there to see Protagoras. In one regard, this odd little comedic moment serves as a wonderfully ironic demonstration of Socrates' fate, wherein Socrates is significantly misunderstood. This misunderstanding of Socrates' identity and function in society is seemingly what Plato attempts to redress in his *Apology of Socrates*.

The defense that Socrates employs in his trial is ultimately unsuccessful. This statement in itself is not controversial. Why, though, did Socrates, a figure who seems more than capable of verbally tangling up any adversary, struggle with convincing the Athenian jurors of his innocence? In one sense, Socrates' goal does not seem to be to achieve an acquittal, he instead seems to remain steadfast in practicing the true political

art by attempting to make his fellow Athenians better. In a greater sense, he may in fact be guilty as charged. Socrates begins his own defense speech by acknowledging that his accusers have made many untrue, yet persuasive statements. Socrates, on the other hand, promises only to speak the truth, in a haphazard fashion as the ideas seem to come to him. Yet as Thomas West, along with numerous other commentators, has pointed out, his speech seems to be carefully composed, following a traditional defense speech organization wherein he alternates between the topics of corruption and impiety.

Socrates begins by reminding his captive audience what their function is. As judges they are to determine “whether the things [Socrates says] are just or not” (18a). While they the judges must determine the justice in the matter, Socrates holds to the fact that he will speak the truth, for the virtue “of an orator is to speak the truth” (18a). This statement in itself must have raised a red flag for the audience that what they would be hearing from Socrates would be contrary to their received notions and opinions. For surely the common conception of an orator has little or nothing to do with the truth. Oratory is merely one branch of activity which Socrates will rehabilitate in his speeches to the jury.

CHAPTER 4

SOCRATES' DEFENSE: A QUESTION OF PURPOSE

How successful then was Socrates' defense speech? As we have noted, he was found guilty as charged. Socrates says things which further outrage his audience, the jury. What good does angering the jury do? But more importantly, are the things Socrates says true? Is it the case that he speaks the truth unrelentingly, ultimately unworried about how he will be perceived as long as he demonstrates his dedication to truth, justice, and virtue? Furthermore, is philosophy consistent with all three? Socrates knows the things he says are unsettling. He repeatedly warns the jury not to make disturbances in response to the surprising claims he makes, but in doing so he simultaneously invites them to doubt the truth of his statements. His first attempt at influencing the audience directly is when he introduces his kind of wisdom: "Now perhaps I will seem to some of you to be joking" (20d). This serves as his first direct warning to the audience, and his warnings and pleading continue throughout his speeches, and notable examples are found at 20e, 21a, 27b, 30c, 31e.

In mounting his defense, Socrates finds it necessary to explode the popular conception of himself. This conception was largely reinforced by Aristophanes' *Clouds*. Aristophanes is not his only old accuser, but the only one Socrates can name. For in truth his first accusers are many, and they have been "talking for many years saying nothing true" (18b). These first accusers, however, he fears more than "Anytus and those around him" (18b). He fears them more than his current accusers because they had been able to persuade many of the Athenians from childhood, and "they accused me in a case that simply went by default, for no one spoke in my defense" (18b). The difficulty that

Socrates has in replacing an improperly formed mental conception of him is of the utmost importance, for philosophy as a noble way of life is also in danger of being extinguished. This is above all Socrates' task in his defense. He must provide a safe haven for philosophy lest it be extinguished with his demise.

Socrates acknowledges repeatedly the difficulty he faces in persuading the Athenians. For he says,

an attempt must be made in this short time to take away from you this slander, which you acquired over a long time. Now I would wish that it may turn out like this, if it is in any way better both for you and for me, and that I may accomplish something by making a defense speech. But I supposed this is hard, and I am not at all unaware of what sort of thing it is. Nevertheless, *let this proceed in whatever way is dear to the god, but the law must be obeyed and a defense speech must be made.* (18e-19a, my emphasis)

Socrates presents himself as being both pious and supportive of the laws of the regime, thus in his speech he seeks to show a deference and respect for the law and for sacred customs. The difficulty Socrates addresses is that these opinions have largely been held for a long time — they are opinions from childhood, closely associated with the youngest memories. In this respect, the memories that others have of Socrates are examples of the quintessential ignorance or claim to knowledge which is not knowledge that Socrates has dedicated his life to removing from others. The removal of bad opinions is in fact a painful and, at times, a shameful experience, but Socrates' belief in the beneficial nature of truth's influence on one's soul leads him to engage the audience in a painful experience wherein they are to reckon with the fact that they have gravely misunderstood

Socrates. As Catherine Zuckert has argued, Socrates' fellow Athenians "did not understand the difference between Socrates and the philosophers who preceded him, and as a result of this misunderstanding, they unjustly condemned him" (Zuckert 203).

Socrates was ultimately unconvincing: "...Plato shows in the *Apology*, Socrates was not able to convince his fellow citizens that his inquiries benefitted rather than harmed them" (203). Why it is ultimately the case that the truth does not bring the results he desires is a grave issue. The truth is often unpleasant. In the *Apology*, Socrates demonstrates that the majority of his fellow Athenians do not live well, which underlies the hatred he has received.

In addressing the accusations of the earliest accusers, Socrates explains how it is that he has become hated. He claims this hatred was aroused by his refutation of three other major classes' claims to wisdom: the politicians, the poets, and the artisans. Their chief fault was in their relationship to wisdom. The politicians claimed to be wise when they were in fact not, and those most associated with wisdom by popular consent were in fact the least wise according to Socrates. There is an apparent inverse relationship between those who are esteemed wise and those who are actually wise. The poets were divinely inspired, but actually unknowing themselves — they were mere conduits of divine wisdom, and they could not explain their poetry, or in the language of Socrates, provide a rational account of what they had done. The artisans, on the other hand, were on the opposite end of the wisdom spectrum from the politicians. They did in fact understand an art of some sort and have knowledge in their particular field, but due to that knowledge, they improperly extrapolated that they had advanced knowledge in all things.

Socrates makes the claim in *Gorgias* that it is only with the soul that we can truly distinguish the good from the pleasurable. If we were left to the impulses of the body alone the good and the pleasant would be indistinguishable, as the body recognizes all pleasures as good. Socrates' example for this is the example of taste and food, which if allowed to take the reins, would lead to general ill-health, only manifesting itself much later. The direct consequences are not the only consequences, but it is the skill of the true rhetor, or Socratic philosopher, to help articulate the ultimate consequences. Socrates offends his listeners because he refuses to flatter them, as the flattery would not lead to improvement, but rather further corruption and ingraining of evils.

CHAPTER 5

HOW SOCRATES BECAME HATED

Socrates' cross-examination of Meletus exemplifies his method of refutation, the Socratic *elenchus*, and reveals Meletus as one who thinks he has attained a form of wisdom, when he has in fact not. Thus, Socrates demonstrates to the court and in this regard Athens by proxy what it in fact is that he has been up to. Meletus' unfounded claim of knowledge is to know who makes others better and who makes others worse, or practically speaking, who corrupts the youngest Athenians. This very claim flies in the face of Socrates' claim to be the true politician in Athens, the only one who partakes in making others better. Meletus, contrasting with Socrates' approach, flatters the audience by claiming in the cross-examination portion that it is the laws, the judges (members of the Athenian jury), the Councilmen, the Assemblymen, and eventually all Athenians who make the youths "noble and good," and that Socrates alone corrupts them (24e-25a). Socrates attempts to demonstrate Meletus' lack of care concerning the most important matters. Socrates' success in revealing the groundlessness of Meletus' pursuit leaves Meletus exposed and aware of his ignorance. Meletus too is young as Socrates reminds us, and there is still time for him to be reoriented and not seek to merely make a name for himself by attacking Socrates. Socrates has done him a great service, but Meletus does not seem to have a philosophical soul. But is this knowledge of our own or, rather, an interlocutor's ignorance not actually a useful place to begin to search in earnest?

Socrates refutes Meletus' claim that Socrates does not believe in the gods and that he teaches others to do so as well by arguing that he believes in *daimonia* and a belief in *daimonia* presupposes a belief in the gods. But, as Thomas West points out, Socrates has

only proven that “Meletus contradicts himself (not even that the charge contradicts itself!)” (West 19). Furthermore, West notes, “Socrates is completely silent about whether he believes in any gods at all, let alone the gods of the city” (19). West’s account of Socrates’ guilt is as follows: “He does not believe in the gods in which the city believes, for he knows that he does not know the truth about them” (19). This Socratic ignorance prevents Socrates from giving a full affirmation of his belief in the gods, and in this way, West argues, Socrates “corrupts the young (in the legal sense of ‘corruption’), for he teaches them to disbelieve in the authority of gods and laws by insisting that firm knowledge replace mere opinion about them” (19). The conclusions of Socratic philosophy are above all dangerous to social order, and, as Catherine Zuckert articulated above, leads those who misunderstand Socrates’ purpose to group him along with the sophists and other natural philosophers. Whereas these intellectuals may come with similar starting points about society, they do not seek to come to knowledge. Rather, they seek to profit from the mutability of the world and the difficulty of discovering the truth. Socrates’ mission in a similar regard is an attempt at reevaluation of social values, and as he is presented in the *Apology*, he wants to make space for noble lives worth living.

CHAPTER 6

SOCRATIC REORIENTATION OF KNOWLEDGE

Socrates attempts to show what ought to lead to shame and embarrassment in contrast to what the Athenians currently believe. We ought, if we are to follow Socrates, to feel shame for our general lack of knowledge and ill-grasp on reality. This knowledge of our ignorance is to act as the foundation for greater understanding. The shame of ignorance is not the stage that Socrates wishes us to remain in, but it ought to be an action-producing shame which helps reorient those affected by it to begin asking questions and to become more aware of when a proper account has been given. Socrates' major target in knowledge is our over-confidence with death.

Socrates denies that dying is shameful and that death is the greatest of evils. He provides his own examples of his own actions at Potidaea, Amphipolis, and Delium, facing death yet remaining courageous. Furthermore, Socrates turns to Achilles, linking his own life to that of the great hero. Socrates attempts to supplant Achilles in the Athenian mind and take on the role of a true man. As a true man, Socrates refuses to use sycophantic rhetoric because it would require him to reinforce the incorrect opinions and ignorant notions that his fellow Athenians currently hold. By doing so, he would in no way benefit their souls, but in fact reinforce corrupting influences upon their souls. This is why Socrates initially puts forward the reward of meals for life in the Prytaneum as something deserved for this 'impiety and corruption,' for in contrast to the Olympic victor who "makes you seem happy," Socrates claims to actually make them so (36d-e). Socrates does not fear death, because he claims he does "not know sufficiently about the things in Hades." He will not allow that lack of knowledge to overcome him in making

decisions concerning matters he does know. He would rather avoid injustice than death, as injustice is a known, knowable evil, which Socrates is convinced harms his soul: “So compared to the bad things which I know are bad, I will never fear or flee the things about which I do not know whether they even happen to be good” (29b). With this shocking statement to the jury, Socrates introduces the idea of death as possibly being a great gain.

CHAPTER 7

THE NOBILITY OF SOCRATES

Living up to his reputation as being ‘wise,’ Socrates wants to act in a way that would be harmonious with his reputation. He may anger his fellow Athenians by refusing to do the things they do, but he explains, he does not,

Not because I am stubborn, men of Athens, nor because I dishonor you. Whether I am daring with regard to death or not is another story; but at any rate as to reputation, mine and yours and the whole city’s, to me it does not seem to be noble for me to do any of these things. For I am old and have this name; and whether it is true or false, it is reputed at least that Socrates is distinguished from the many human beings in some way. If, then, those of you who are reputed to be distinguished, whether in wisdom or courage or any other virtue at all, will act this way, it would be shameful. I have often seen some who are just like this when they are judged: although they are reputed to be something, they do wondrous deeds, since they suppose that they will suffer something terrible if they die—as though they would be immortal if they did not kill them. (35a-b)

There is something deeply ennobling in Socrates’ claim to care more for the city than for his own well-being and for truly attempting to live out a noble life. “Ever since,” Plato published the *Apology of Socrates*, says West, “Socrates has served as the model of the nobility and justice of philosophy” (23). Reinforcing a sense of shame, justice, and limits, rather than the boundary-shattering approach of the rhetoricians and sophists who offer to teach skills which permit the users to avoid all repercussions for their actions, Socrates argues for the good of truth and knowledge as being the actual bedrock for civic life

while simultaneously calling into question the received foundation of piety. Socrates' pursuit of the unity of the virtues over a conception of virtue which allows for a plurality leads him to prefer truth, the greatest unity. Socrates argues that we should, to the best of our ability, remain unified with ourselves and in agreement with ourselves and the truth. If we are not in agreement with the most important thing, then it is natural to feel shame. Socrates then does not shy away from using shame to reinforce his arguments. But angered by his attempt to shame them, the jurors condemn him, feeling as though they have acted justly. They feel that they have justice on their side for punishing an individual who transgresses the most sacred institutions, the proper practice of religion and the raising of children.

CHAPTER 8

WHAT DID THE APOLOGY OF SOCRATES ACCOMPLISH?

Providing Athens with the greatest good, the philosophic life, Socrates fulfilled his claim to be the greatest civic leader. He fulfilled the role of the true politician, by making philosophy seemingly compatible with the political community. Philosophy, by far more important than any dock, harbor, or wall, could only be safely established in Athens if it could be shown to be beneficial, and not only as a moral good, but as a practical benefit. Socrates' claim is that he increases the overall happiness of the *polis* by removing truly harmful beliefs. Plato's *Apology* depicts his granting greatest good that Socrates claims to offer in the *Gorgias*. Socrates attempts to make philosophy safe for the *polis*, and, in so doing, make the *polis* "tolerate" philosophers (Zuckert 213). While Socrates was ultimately unsuccessful in his own case, Plato's oeuvre completes what Socrates had initiated. The *Apology* attempts to show how philosophy is not only compatible with the *polis*, but good for it. Plato constructs the dialogues with care. As they are not just historical accounts of real conversations, he has the creative freedom to include details as he sees fit to inform our understanding (cf. *Phaedrus*). One such detail is the presence of Chaerephon in both works, who functioning as a pro-democracy figure, informs our understanding of Socrates as a friend to democracy, albeit a strong critic.

CHAPTER 9

TEXTUAL ECHOES I: CHAEREPHON, SOCRATES' YES-SAYING DAIMONION

As a general principle of interpretation, a reader should first acknowledge details which might seem superfluous, even petty, before the reader dismisses them outright. One such detail is a direct point of contact between the *Gorgias* and the *Apology*, the figure of Chaerephon. The dramatic framing of the *Gorgias* relays to us that Socrates had missed a rhetorical demonstration by Gorgias because Socrates had arrived late, leaving him open to mockery by Callicles in the opening line of the dialogue: “You’re in nice time, Socrates. For a war or battle, as the saying goes” (447a). While the joke reveals that the best time to show up to a war is at the end, after the greatest danger has passed, it also hints at a lack of courage on Socrates’ part, or to foreshadow later arguments of Callicles, the joke plays on a preference for pleasure over pain as the most important measure of the good life. Socrates, though, is quick to blame Chaerephon for “hanging around in the agora” (447a). Chaerephon claims to be a friend of Gorgias and asserts some form of control over Gorgias with seemingly no limits: “Don’t worry, Socrates. Let me also be the one to put things right. Gorgias is a friend of mine. He’ll put on a demonstration for us – *now, if you like, or, if you prefer, some other time*” (447b, my emphasis).

Chaerephon’s involvement in the conversation is limited, but he acts as something of a conduit for Socrates at each major transition within the dialogue. We see him here as presenting himself as both a friend to Gorgias and a friend to Socrates, for in the general introduction to the dialogue he seems to imitate Socrates in asking “what would be the right thing for us to call him?” (448c) or in another sense, *what is Gorgias?* The answer to this seemingly straightforward question is explored for the remainder of the dialogue.

The conversation continues on in three unequal parts: first, Socrates' discussion with Gorgias, then his conversation with Polus, and finally his longest conversation of the dialogue with Callicles. But, at each juncture, Chaerephon is called upon to provide his testimony. Slightly before Polus takes over the argument from Gorgias at 461b, Socrates asks Gorgias if he holds the same view of dialogue and dialectic as Socrates does.

Socrates' stance is that conversation should aim at revealing the truth come what may, to which Gorgias affirms that he does. Gorgias, however, immediately asks to break up the conversation, perhaps seeing where Socrates' questioning is tending, and he asks to call it a day for fear that the audience's interest has waned (458b-c). At this moment,

Chaerephon chimes in with the following short speech:

You can hear the reaction for yourselves, Gorgias and Socrates. All these men are willing to listen to anything you have to say. And for my part, I hope I shall never be so busy that I find myself having to say no to talk of this kind, conducted in this way, because I have something more important to do. (458c)

Chaerephon is impassioned in his asserting his attention and the interest of his fellow listeners, which gains the assurance from Callicles as well (458d). Whereas Socrates' *daimon* holds him back from speaking, Chaerephon encourages him to do so. Socrates asks Gorgias what his art is and eventually Socrates secures from Gorgias his agreement to the claim that the true rhetorician is "incapable of using rhetoric in an unjust way or being prepared to act unjustly" (461b). This conclusion enrages Gorgias' youngest admirer present, Polus. Polus launches from this juncture a staunch defense of Gorgias on the grounds that Socrates deliberately made Gorgias feel embarrassed.

Before the final third of the *Gorgias*, Callicles again appeals to Chaerephon after Socrates' argument leads to the conclusion that rhetoric is best used to help our friends and harm our enemies in a boldly reimagined sense (481a-b). "Tell me, Chaerephon," Callicles asks, "is Socrates serious? Or is he joking?" (481b). In a response echoing a statement Callicles made concerning Gorgias at the beginning of the dialogue (447c), Chaerephon says that Socrates is "deadly serious," but that there is nothing "like asking the man himself" (481b). From this moment on, Callicles remains engaged with Socrates in conversation. At each moment of transition in the dialogues, we see that Chaerephon initiates further conversations and promotes dialogue between Socrates and others. He continues this role, albeit posthumously, in the *Apology*.

Readers of Plato's *Apology of Socrates* will be familiar with the tale that Socrates tells concerning the origin of his notoriety. In response to his first accusers, Socrates offers a response to the accusation that he is a natural philosopher (atheist) and a teacher who corrupts the young (sophist). Socrates claims not to be a teacher, for he accepts no fees for his conversations, and he lauds those who can make a living teaching, albeit in an ironic manner (19e). "I would be pluming and priding myself on it if I had knowledge of these things. But I do not have knowledge of them, men of Athens" (20c).

With these accusations seemingly brushed away, Socrates introduces a new question by impersonating the jury in order to create and sustain an artificial dialogue with the men of Athens. Someone might ask:

Well, Socrates, what is *your* affair? Where have these slanders against you come from? For surely if you were in fact practicing nothing more uncommon than others, such a report and account would not have arisen, unless you were doing

something different from the many. So tell us what it is, so that we do not deal
unadvisedly with you. (20c)

In response to this self-imposed question, Socrates relates a tale which prominently features Chaerephon as the link between Socrates and Apollo. For Chaerephon "...went to Delphi and dared to consult the oracle about this...and he asked whether there was anyone wiser than I" (21a). "The Pythia" famously "replied that no one was wiser" (21a) than Socrates, thus beginning Socrates' attempt to unravel the meaning of the god's prophecy. The act of piety, as Socrates presents it, of attempting to understand the god led him to become hated by the most influential parts of the *polis*, the politicians and the poets (21c-22e). Thus we see again Chaerephon functioning as a positive force for Socrates by bringing him together with others as a counter-force to his own *daimonion* which only warns him not to do something: "This is something which began for me in childhood: a sort of voice comes, and whenever it comes, it always turns me away from whatever I am about to do, but never turns me forward" (31). Socrates appeals to the jury's own knowledge of Chaerephon: "You do know what sort of man Chaerephon was, *how vehement he was in whatever he set out to do*" (21a, my emphasis). In this vehemence, Chaerephon thrusts Socrates into the greatest of affairs.

CHAPTER 10

TEXTUAL ECHOES II: THE ROLE OF TRIALS IN THE GORGIAS

Plato's *Gorgias* is replete with references and allusions to the trial of Socrates. The use of trial imagery and language extends throughout the whole of the dialogue to the point that Plato seems to expect the reader of the *Gorgias* to be intimately aware of what will happen to Socrates. While it is self-evident from the internal workings of the dialogue that the *Gorgias* is set earlier than the *Apology*, the dialogue consistently points forward to Socrates' own demise at the hands of the *polis*. His fate is almost never to be forgotten and it is seemingly imposed, to use a non-Platonic anachronism, as a watermark behind the text. By my assessment there are no less than twelve overt references to the trial of Socrates. While I cannot claim to have completely rooted out every reference and minor allusion, the list that follows contains the most poignant reminders of Socrates' trial and fate.

1. At 464d-e, Socrates first uses the image of a doctor and cook having a competition before a jury of children to determine who is the true "expert on beneficial and harmful foods" to help illustrate Socrates' distinction between arts which aim at what is pleasurable and sciences which aim at what is best. The result of the hypothetical trial is that "the doctor would die of starvation" (464e).
2. At 471e-472a, Socrates accuses Polus of using the "orator's way of trying to prove" Socrates wrong, "just like those who think they are proving people wrong in the lawcourts" (471e). The method involves producing "lots of reputable witnesses," but Socrates argues that "this is of no value

when it comes to getting at the truth” (471e). “It can happen,” he prophesies “that somebody is the victim of wholesale perjury – and from a lot of people who have some reputation” (472a). Socrates will famously call no real witnesses to his defense, unless one considers his appeal to the Delphic oracle and, by proxy, *Apollo*.

3. At 478a, in his conversation with Polus, Socrates argues that one ought to take those who “act unjustly and without restraint” to appear before judges, and that those who “punish correctly employ justice of some kind in their punishment” (478a).
4. At 480a-b, Socrates recommends that a person who acts unjustly should take himself to a judge as soon as possible to “pay for his crimes as quickly as possible, going before the judge as he would to a doctor, in his determination not to allow the disease of injustice to become chronic, leaving his soul festering and incurable” (480a-b).
5. At 480e-481b, during Socrates’ deeply ironic reevaluation of rhetoric, he claims that it can be most useful as a means to harm our enemy’s soul and make them as corrupt as possible, and “we should do everything we can, in deed and word, to stop him from paying his crimes or coming before a judge” (480e-481a).
6. At 484d-e, Callicles articulates that the philosophic pursuit that Socrates has been on his entire life has put him on a crash course with the *polis* and that Socrates is altogether ignorant of the most important things because philosophers “are without experience of the laws of the city, of the

language required in dealings with people” (484d). Furthermore, if Socrates were to appear before the *polis* Callicles predicts that he will make himself “a laughing-stock” (484e), which reminds readers of the *Apology* of the constant presence of both anger and laughter which appears throughout the jury’s outbursts and Socrates’ attempts to quell the interruptions.

7. At 486a-d, Callicles expresses the dangers that Socrates exposes himself to by not pursuing rhetoric seriously as the next study after philosophy. Due to this Socrates will be unable to defend himself in court: “You’d be had up in court, find yourself facing some altogether contemptible and vicious accuser, and if he chose to demand the death penalty for you, you’d be put to death” (486b).
8. At 495d, Socrates holds a mock legal deposition of Callicles by identifying his deme as he begins to refute Callicles’ claim that the pleasurable and the good are identical, holding his own trial: “Let’s keep it on the record, then, that Callicles from the deme of Acharnae said that the pleasant and the good were the same thing, but that knowledge and courage were something different, both from each other and from the good” (495d).
9. At 508c, Socrates returns to Callicles’ claim at 486a-d (7 above) that it is shameful for Socrates to be incapable of defending himself by affirming the conclusion that the person who commits injustice is more disgraceful

than the person who suffers injustice. Socrates addresses the impossibility of a worse man truly harming a better man at 30d of the *Apology*.

10. At 515e, Socrates brings Pericles up on charges of corruption and holds a mock trial of him with the conclusion that “Pericles was not a good statesman, by this argument” (516d), for he made the people worse while leading them.
11. From 521b-522c, Socrates provides a hypothetical account of what his day in court will look like, wherein he emphasizes that “it would be no great surprise if [he] were put to death” (521d).
12. Finally, concluding the dialogue from 523a-527e, Socrates provides a detailed depiction of the afterlife, which consists of Zeus’ reforms of Cronos’ lawcourts, whereby Zeus provides perfect justice for mortals, ultimately depicting rhetoric of being no value as the god-judges will look “with the soul itself at the soul itself” and all of our earthly accoutrements will be left behind so “that the judging may be just” (523e).

The presence of these references requires the reader to reconsider the *Apology* in light of what is said in the *Gorgias* and to take from the *Gorgias* a greater understanding of Socrates’ view of rhetoric, politics, and justice. The *Gorgias* completes the reader’s understanding of why Socrates refuses to use rhetoric to escape punishment and what sort of precise ‘Socratic’ rhetoric we will find in the *Apology*.

CHAPTER 11

THE GORGIAS: HOW DOES SOCRATES UNDERSTAND RHETORIC?

The *Gorgias*, like the *Apology*, is composed of three major sections. In the first section (447c-461b), Socrates holds a discussion with Gorgias, where Socrates helps Gorgias develop what rhetoric is as Socrates extracts a definition of rhetoric based on Gorgias' coy statements after several equally inconclusive initial attempts by Polus to articulate a clear definition. In the second section (461b-481b), Socrates has an extended conversation with Polus who feels the need to defend Gorgias and the value of rhetoric. The conversation here is where Socrates shares his understanding of rhetoric as a subspecies of flattery or sycophancy, and Socrates argues for a complete reevaluation of rhetoric as a means to aid our friends and harm our enemies. In the third and final section (481b-527e), Socrates engages with his most challenging interlocutor present, Callicles, who seems to remain steadfast in his belief in the superiority of the unrestrained life. Midway through this section at 500a-505b, Socrates defines the form of rhetoric which seemingly goes unpracticed in the *polis*, what he later calls 'true rhetoric' (517b).

The quasi-mythological figure of the 'good orator' leads one to wonder if Socrates thinks of himself in this capacity — that is to say, does he himself fulfill this role, and consequently is it even possible to practice rhetoric in this way? After Socrates explains his conception of true rhetoric, Callicles, in anger and annoyance, all but gives up having a conversation with Socrates stating to Socrates: "I'm not interested in any of these things you are talking about. I've only been giving you these answers to please Gorgias" (505c). Socrates is forced to continue the conversation on his own even to the point of being his own interlocutor for part of the dialogue (506c-507b). Socrates claims

“that the person who is going to be the right sort of rhetorician really must be just and know what is just, which is what Polus in his turn said that Gorgias agreed to out of embarrassment” (508c). Towards the end of their conversation, Socrates makes the claim he is “attempting the true science of politics” in the sense that he is concerned with making people better. How then does Socrates go about making those he interacts with better? What does he understand this to be? With this claim that he intends to make others better has he in fact made Gorgias better, or Polus, or Callicles for that matter? Are there preconditions that need to be met for Socrates to improve an interlocutor?

CHAPTER 12

WHAT IS THE ART OF RHETORIC? SOCRATES' EXCHANGE WITH GORGIAS

Socrates' discussion with Gorgias on the nature of rhetoric reveals Gorgias' lack of care concerning justice. Through his discussion with Gorgias, Socrates attempts to provide Gorgias with a significant bit of self-knowledge, as he reveals to Gorgias that he has not adequately considered the importance of justice. Gorgias, though, seems unaffected by this revelation. Gorgias in fact does not care about justice as demonstrated by his *Encomium to Helen*, wherein he defends Helen on each major account levied against her, demonstrating his ability and will to defend anyone from any charge, completely dismantling any conception of justice or responsibility. Socrates begins to reveal to Gorgias his separation from the knowledge of the true things when he begins to analyze Polus' first attempt to explain what the proper thing to call Gorgias is. Polus gives something of a non-answer when he informs the group that Gorgias' art is implied to be the "preserve of the best people" and that the "art he is involved in" is "the finest there is" (448c). Socrates jokes that Polus has developed "quite a way with words," implying that Gorgias' rhetorical training is actually less than stellar. More importantly, Socrates points out that this answer did not clarify what his art *is*. Gorgias seems to find nothing wrong with the answer and even questions Socrates' account: "How exactly is he not keeping it, Socrates?" (448c). Gorgias, it appears, has become so acclimatized to rhythmic language that he has perhaps forgotten that the first purpose of language is to be understood — Polus repeated variations of the word experience in his explanation, but he did not enlighten. After bypassing Polus, who Socrates claims has "more practice at what

is known as rhetoric than at discussing things,” Socrates is able to pry from Gorgias that he is an expert in the art of rhetoric (448d and 449a).

Seeking for a definition of rhetoric with Gorgias proves a somewhat fruitless task, as Gorgias seems unwilling to follow the examples that Socrates sets. Gorgias promises to avoid all long speeches and promises to answer as concisely as possible (449c). His concision, however, impedes the progress of the discussion, as he consistently provides one-word answers which Socrates must then expand upon. For instance, Gorgias explains in one word that rhetoric is the knowledge of speaking (449d). Socrates is able to continue to develop his definition at 451d where they agree that rhetoric “is in fact one of the arts or sciences which uses speaking to get everything accomplished and settled,” but Socrates pushes Gorgias to be more precise. Socrates wants Gorgias to express the ‘quid’ of rhetoric, but Gorgias often pivots to the ‘quale.’ Gorgias claims that rhetoric concerns the “greatest human affairs, Socrates, and the best” (451d). Both are elements of quality or kind, but Socrates desires the essence of rhetoric.

In order to aid Gorgias in their search, Socrates turns to a drinking song of all places, one “where they count blessings: ‘First is good health, then looks, then wealth,’ so the songwriter has it, ‘that is honestly come by’ (451e). If each person who produced such a good (such as the doctor, the fitness expert, the businessman) were present, Socrates claims that they would all testify that “Gorgias is deceiving you, Socrates. It is not his art that is concerned with the greatest good for humanity, but mine” (452a). Socrates too seems to want to convict Gorgias on behalf of philosophy. There is after all no mention of wisdom as the greatest good or virtue. It is perhaps the case that the philosopher as understood by Socrates cannot produce wisdom or virtue in others as the

sophists claim they can. But, rather, perhaps the philosopher can only guide others to pursue wisdom, as they have not attained it themselves, and it perhaps remains unattainable. The philosopher then can only reveal the inadequacy in the individual and leave the pursuit and love for wisdom as a possible response. Nonetheless, after formulating challenges from each individual, Socrates presses Gorgias to respond in kind to clearly answer the challenge: “*What* is it that you say is the greatest good people can have, and that you can create it?” (452d). Gorgias’ response is a lesson in patience for he claims that the ‘thing...which is in truth the greatest good and the cause both of freedom for people themselves and at the same time of each person’s rule over others in his own city” is that which he knows (452d). Socrates must push him one step further to articulate what this thing actually is – to which Gorgias responds with a flurry of powers:

Persuasion, I would say. The ability to persuade by means of speeches, whether it be jurymen on the jury, councilors in the council-chamber, assembly members in the assembly – or any other meeting which is a meeting of citizens. In fact, by this power you will make a slave of the doctor, a slave of the fitness expert. (452e)

The other element of this power is that one will be able to “persuade large groups of people” (452e). Gorgias begins with persuading but ends with enslaving. Socrates is quick to point out that rhetoric is not the only art that deals with persuasion as in fact all arts can have an element of speaking and persuasion (453b-454a). Gorgias reaffirms that rhetoric deals with “persuasion that goes on in the lawcourts and in other large gatherings...in connection with what is just and unjust” (454b). In regard to this reaffirmation, Socrates explores with Gorgias the difference between learning and conviction as both seemingly can be arrived at through persuasion.

Gorgias admits that learning and conviction are two separate things entirely, and Gorgias agrees with Socrates that there can be such a thing “as a false and a true” conviction whereas there is no such thing as true and false knowledge (454d). Socrates argues that there are in fact “two forms of persuasion – one producing conviction without knowledge, the other producing knowledge” (454e). Furthermore, when pressed, Gorgias admits that rhetoric is the kind of “persuasion which produces conviction, not the persuasion which teaches, on the subject of justice and injustice” (455a). Furthermore, “the orator,” Socrates elaborates, “is not someone capable of teaching juries and other gatherings, on the subject of justice and injustice, but only of persuading them. Presumably he wouldn’t be able to teach matters of such important to a gathering that size in a short time” (455a). Socrates’ point here finds an echo in another work of Plato, for in the *Republic*, Socrates spends a long time talking with a small group about the nature of justice and its superiority to the unjust life. Similarly, Socrates makes the recommendation in the *Apology* that capital cases should not last only one day in length as they are matters of justice dealing with the most influential decision possible:

I am convinced that I do not do injustice to any human being voluntarily, but I am not persuading you of this. For we have conversed with each other a short time. Since, as I supposed, if you had a law like other human beings, not to judge anyone in a matter of death in one day alone, but over many, you would be persuaded. But as it is, it is not easy in a short time to do away with great slanders. (37a)

The idea that an orator could actually provide many people at the same time with a clear conception of justice and injustice strikes Socrates as patently absurd. Each person has

their own misunderstood conception of justice which would need to be examined and removed from his or her soul before a true conception of justice could be planted in its place, and these incorrect notions of justice largely stem from the teachings of the poets which are often reinforced by the politicians. It is according to Socrates a great good to benefit another person in this way, for as Socrates explains to Gorgias before he begins to reveal to Gorgias his contradictory understanding of rhetoric and his deficient understanding of the nature of justice:

I regard [being proved wrong if I have said something not true] as the greater good, to the extent that ridding oneself of a very great evil is a greater good than ridding someone else of one. And there is no greater evil for a human being, in my opinion, than a false opinion on the subjects we are actually talking about now. (458a-b)

Socrates asks Gorgias if he shares the same view on being refuted since Socrates is about to thoroughly explode Gorgias' conception of rhetoric, for by the expression 'at large gatherings,' Gorgias really means amongst the *ignorant* (459a). For the orator could not really be more persuasive amongst a group of doctors concerning a speech about medicine. Socrates presses Gorgias to declare though whether knowledge is essential to rhetoric or not, or if the orator will not know "what is good or what is bad, what is beautiful or what is ugly, or just and unjust – but having contrived some device for persuading people about them" instead (459d). In response to this, Gorgias claims that he will teach these things if the student "doesn't in fact know them already, then these are things he will learn from [Gorgias] as well" (460a). With this admission, Socrates reasons that "the rhetorician is just" and "that the just person wants to do just things," therefore

the “rhetorician will never be willing to act unjustly” (460b-c). While Socrates has demonstrated that Gorgias has not taken justice seriously and the influence that he wields seriously with the power of rhetoric (460c-d), Gorgias does not seem to be at all affected by this knowledge. He acts entirely like someone whose capacity for excitement has been exhausted — he does not express any wonder at the world, and he signaled as much when he claimed at the start that it had been “many years now since anybody” had asked him “anything new” (448a). In this regard, Socrates has attempted to help Gorgias and make him better by revealing the necessity of justice, but Gorgias seems unwilling to change. He would rather remain as he is as a profitable rhetoric teacher than seek the truth like Socrates.

CHAPTER 13

WHAT IS THE PROPER FUNCTION OR USE OF RHETORIC? SOCRATES'

EXCHANGE WITH POLUS

The art of rhetoric has corrupted Polus to point that he believes, like Gorgias, that he can answer any question (462a). Polus is in the greatest state of ignorance, as Socrates conceives of it in the *Apology*, in that he thinks he knows when he does not know (21d). It is Socrates' task to expose his ignorance of the most important thing, justice, while also articulating for the other interlocutors present Socrates' precise understanding of rhetoric as an imitation of the science of politics. Socrates begins by providing a full account of his understanding of rhetoric and its place as a skill, not a science.

Socrates declares that rhetoric is in fact not a science but a skill aimed “at producing pleasure and enjoyment of some sort” (462c). It is an “activity...characteristic of a soul which is intuitive, bold, with a natural gift for handling people” (463a). Rhetoric, then, is a sub-skill of the skill of sycophancy (463b). Precisely stated by Socrates, “rhetoric is...an imitation of a subdivision of the science of politics” (463c-d). This claim of Socrates' rouses Gorgias from his stupor, and he expresses true interest for the first time in the dialogue: “Never mind [Polus]. Tell me what you mean when you say rhetoric is an imitation of a subdivision of the science of politics” (463e). Socrates asks Gorgias if he believes that there is a kind of well-being of the soul and the body and similarly so if there is a likeness which “makes the body and the soul *seem* to be in good condition” (464a, my emphasis) — to which Gorgias gives his assent. At 464b, Socrates then states what the two sciences are which correspond to souls and bodies. The first set Socrates claims “looks after the soul.” He calls this set politics, which consists of the

science of legislating and the science of justice. In the second set which looks after the body, Socrates is hesitant to give a name, but, for clarity's sake, I will call this the science of *health*, consisting of the science of physical fitness training and the science of medicine. These four divisions of the noble, good, and admirable sciences are related by their function. As (1) legislating is to (2) physical fitness training, so is (3) justice to (4) medicine. The first set, legislating and physical fitness, are necessary to maintain an already healthy composition, whether it be a soul or a body. Whereas justice and medicine are required as remedies for the soul and the body in need of rehabilitation respectively. Therefore, according to this distinction, there are four true sciences which are required for taking care of the body and the soul, and they "always [look] with a view to what is best" (464c). Rhetoric on, the other hand, develops out of an intuition of sycophancy to imitate the true sciences (464c-d).

Sycophancy, which Socrates describes as having "no concern with what is best, but uses pleasure of the moment to ensnare and deceive folly, masquerading as something of the greatest value," "impersonates each of the [four] subdivisions, and pretends to be that which it impersonates" (464d). Furthermore, the sycophantic skill is not a science as it "can give no rational explanation of the thing it is catering for, nor of the nature of the things it is providing, so it can't tell you the cause of each" (465a). In sum the four ignoble skills of cosmetics, cookery, sophistry, and rhetoric are imitations of physical fitness training, medicine, legislating, and justice (465b-c). Socrates also provides an interesting explanation for why people often confuse sophistry with rhetoric, when in fact sophistry is a superior skill: "... I say they are all closely related, so that sophists and orators get mixed up, working as they do in the same area and dealing with the same

things. They don't know what to make of themselves, nor do other people know what to make of them" (465c). Socrates goes so far as to say that if the soul were not the ruler over the body, then "cooking and medicine [could not be] scrutinized and distinguished by the soul," and, furthermore, everything "would be mixed up together, with no attempt to distinguish what relates to medicine, health or cooking" (465d). The distinction that Socrates makes between the noble sciences and the ignoble skills or knacks is the heart of the distinction between Socrates and Gorgias, or between the philosophic life as understood by the quest for the best contra the life of mere politician which aims at providing the greatest pleasures for the political community.

Furthermore, Socrates wishes to practice the science of politics by improving the soul of Polus. He must do so by dissuading Polus from his initial inclination that "being treated unjustly" is "a greater evil" than treating others unjustly (469b). Polus claims that the "one who is put to death unjustly is both to be pitied and wretched" (469b), which is ultimately Socrates' situation. Socrates argues that it is in fact those "who [put] him to death" who ought to be pitied and thought wretched. Ultimately, Socrates claims that the greatest shame is reserved for those who commit injustice willingly, then those who suffer justly for their punishment, and then least of all those deserve shame who suffer unjust punishments. Polus remains astonished at this reasoning, and Socrates supplies him with his simple principle on ethics: "For the simple reason that acting unjustly is in fact the greatest of evils" (469b).

Polus remains perplexed throughout his discussion with Socrates, as he consistently relies on a combination of conventional wisdom and Gorgias' promises concerning rhetoric to guide his life. He thinks the happiest life is that of the tyrant, and

he is allured to the sweetness of limitless power, and he seems to relish the possibility of the tyrannical life: “Don’t they put to death anyone they will, confiscate property, and banish from their cities anyone they please?” (466b-c). He understands the orator as possessing an art which gives him access to tyrannical powers in the *polis*. Socrates is able to make progress with Polus only after he has helped Polus see that “we will things which are good, while the things which are neither good nor bad we don’t will” (468c). This attachment to the good of even the tyrannical impulses leads Polus to accept eventually that acting unjustly is more disgraceful than being treated unjustly (474c). Socrates also helps Polus understand why those who remain with a corrupt soul do so. They act out of ignorance and remain in a state of illness due to their ignorance of the good:

Because he doesn’t know, seemingly, what kind of a thing health is, or excellence of body. And from what has now been agreed by us, people who avoid just punishment are also probably doing the same kind of thing, Polus. They can see the painful side to it, but are blind to the beneficial side. They don’t know how much more wretched it is to live with a soul which is not healthy, but rotten, unjust, unholy, than to live with an unhealthy body. That’s why they will go to any lengths to avoid paying for their crimes – and avoid getting rid of the greatest evil – providing themselves with money, friends and most persuasive oratory they can muster. But if the things we have agreed on are true, Polus, do you see the things that follow from the argument? (479b-c)

If a person acts unjustly, according to Socrates, he should seek out aid immediately “of his own accord, to some place where he can pay for his crimes as quickly as possible,

going before the judge as he would to a doctor, in his determination not to allow the disease of injustice to become chronic, leaving his soul festering and incurable” (480a-b). Socrates, practicing the science of politics on Polus, acts as a doctor to Polus’ soul by helping him unravel the medicinal and therapeutic argument that his soul most needs: “Don’t be afraid of answering, Polus. You won’t come to any harm. Put yourself in the hands of the argument, there’s a brave fellow – think of it as a doctor – and answer” (475d). In this manner, Socrates’ science of politics becomes the art of the ideal statesman, doctor, and judge all in one.

In concluding his conversation with Polus, Socrates calls for a complete reevaluation of rhetoric recasting the traditional moral principle of ‘helping friends and harming enemies’ in a bold new manner. If rhetoric is to find a good use, it must be transformed from being used to shelter injustice to instead be used to expose injustice starting

first and foremost [with the rhetor] himself, but also any among his family or anybody else among his friends who on any particular occasion acts unjustly – not sheltering them but bringing the unjust action into the light of day, so that he may pay for this crime and become healthy. He should compel himself and the others not to play the coward but grit his teeth and present himself well and bravely, as if to a doctor for surgery or cautery, in pursuit of the good and fine, taking no account of the pain. If the unjust things he has done deserve the lash, he should offer himself for a beating; for imprisonment, if they deserve prison; he should pay a fine if they deserve that; go into exile, if they deserve exile; or be put to death, if they deserve death. He should himself be the first accuser both of himself

and of the rest of his family, and that is what he should use rhetoric for – to make sure their unjust actions come to light, and they rid themselves of the greatest evil, which is injustice.” (480c-d)

While on the other hand, Socrates’ complete revaluation of rhetoric can also be used to keep our enemies from healing their souls:

Then again, turning it round the other way, if there is ever the need to do someone an injury – either an enemy or anyone at all – then provided we are not ourselves being treated unjustly by our enemy – we have to watch that – no, so long as it’s someone else our enemy is treating unjustly, then we should do everything we can, in deed and word, to stop him paying for his crimes or coming before the judge. And if the case does come to court, we should engineer his acquittal, and make sure our enemy does not pay for his crimes. If he has stolen a large sum of money, we should make sure he does not pay it back, but keeps it and spends it on himself and his friends, unjustly and godlessly. If his unjust actions deserve death, we should see that he does not suffer death – preferably not ever, so that he can be immortal in his wickedness, but failing that, see that he lives as long as possible the way he is. For that sort of purpose, Polus, I think rhetoric is some use, since the person who is not planning to act unjustly I don’t think its use is very great – if indeed it is any use at all, which it hasn’t been shown to be anywhere in our earlier discussion. (480e-481b)

These radical revaluations of rhetoric leave his interlocutors stupefied, but not satisfied, and Callicles returns to the front to challenge Socrates’ assessment of rhetoric and Socrates’ conception of the superiority of the just life.

CHAPTER 14

WHY SOCRATIC PHILOSOPHY CONSTITUTES THE TRUE SCIENCE OF POLITICS

Callicles expresses shock and wonder at Socrates' statement on the purpose of rhetoric and asks Chaerephon if Socrates is sincere, or if he is joking. For if Socrates is serious, then there needs to be a complete revolution in our moral actions (481c). From Socrates' perspective we are often all doing the exact opposite of what we should be doing because most individuals believe contradictory things about justice. Before Socrates can reorient Callicles' mistaken view on justice, he must first remind him of their shared connection, love, lest Callicles think that Socrates is too far removed from the realm of reality.

Socrates' argument with Callicles begins by finding a place of common ground for both Callicles and Socrates. Socrates and Callicles can communicate, Socrates states, because like all humans they have a shared human experience which makes conversation possible, otherwise "if one of us had some private experience not shared by others, then he wouldn't find it easy to explain his own feelings to another" (481c-d). In Socrates' and Callicles' cases this shared human experience that can be communicated is their shared loves. While the objects differ, for Socrates the love is for Alcibiades and philosophy, whereas for Callicles it is the Athenian people, *demos*, and "Demos the son of Pylilampes" (481d). This love for the people is what Socrates claims leads Callicles to say contradictory statements about the good life, for as Socrates tells him "...you have the love of the *demos* in your soul" (513c). It is Socrates' goal to expose this contradictory impulse in Callicles' soul and to turn him towards the orderly life, whereas

Callicles wishes to persuade Socrates to move on from philosophy and partake in the life of politics popularly understood. In some capacity, Callicles expresses a care for Socrates' well-being as he wants Socrates to avoid suffering at the hands of the *demos*. His love of the *demos* seems to enable him to prophesy.

In comparing their loves, Socrates at first sounds like he is complementing Callicles when he claims that Callicles is "the same every time" (481d). This quality is something that Socrates says about himself repeatedly, for he repeats the truth because it is truly arrived at from his love philosophy, and, therefore, any change would be to something inferior. Callicles' speeches remain the same, however, in that they are relative to his two beloveds and always directed to them, the *demos* and Demos:

"Whatever your darlings say, however they say things are, you have no power to oppose them, but keep changing your ground this way and that" (481d). Socrates here harps on Callicles' lack of power in the sense that he is unable to will as he pleases, signaling back to his conversation with Polus concerning the nature of rhetoric as a form of sycophancy or flattery in 463a-c and the tyrant's ultimate lack of power established in 466a-468e. Socrates seems to draw upon knowledge of Callicles' soul as he imagines what Callicles would say in his defense if someone were to ask him why he makes the absurd statements that he does: "You would probably say – if you wanted to tell the truth – that unless someone makes your darling give up this way of talking, then you won't ever stop saying these things either" (481e-482a). On the other hand, Socrates claims to be speaking on behalf of his darling, philosophy, who "is much less capricious than [his] other darling," Alcibiades (482a). The digression comparing Alcibiades to philosophy in the *Gorgias* is peculiar for three reasons. Alcibiades' treachery is hinted at obliquely in this quote, as his

capricious character will lead him to change sides multiple times during the Peloponnesian War. Furthermore, in a subsequent section, Socrates warns Callicles that the Athenian people may one day come after Callicles himself “if you’re not careful, and my friend Alcibiades, when they lose what they had to start with as well as the gains they have made...” (519b). These prophetic statements concerning the ultimate fate of Alcibiades and the *demos*’ numerous attempts to recall him during the Peloponnesian War and trial in absentia hint at what sort of fate Callicles might have in store for himself if he continues on his current path, as the *polis* is fickle.

In order for Socrates to give up his attachment to philosophy, Callicles must refute his argument, and the challenge Callicles is presented with is immense:

What you have to do is get philosophy, which is my darling, to give up saying them. What philosophy keeps saying, my dear friend, is what you are now hearing from me; and as I see it, she is much less capricious than my other darling. We all know the son of Cleinias – now of one opinion, now of another – whereas philosophy is always of the same opinion. She says the things you now find so surprising, though you were here yourself when they were being said. So, as I was saying just now, you can either prove her wrong by showing that acting unjustly, and getting away with it when you do act unjustly, is not the most extreme of all evils – or if you let it go without proving it wrong, then by the dog of the Egyptians, Callicles, you will not have Callicles agreeing with you.” (482a-b)

From Socrates’ perspective the challenge is for Callicles to refute his earlier claim of the superiority of the just life and in so doing attempt the impossible, to refute the truth. Callicles and all followers of Gorgias seem willing to attempt such things due to their

overconfidence in the power of rhetoric. They mistakenly believe that they have found a power which makes them as powerful as the gods. This belief though causes internal division, whereas Socrates wants Callicles to value unity and order.

Socrates wants to promote in Callicles' soul a certain comfort with breaking away from the *demos*. Socrates expresses the desire to be in tune with himself over and above all others: "I think it is better...that the greater part of mankind should disagree with me and contradict me, than that I, this one person, should be out of harmony with myself and contradict myself" (482c). Socrates' stance against the *demos* heightens the articulation he makes of Callicles' willingness to do anything to flatter the *demos* in order to gain the favor of the *demos*.

In attempting to refute Socrates, Callicles claims that Socrates has "played to the gallery" himself in that he relied on appealing to "conventional morality" in his conversation with Polus and Gorgias when Socrates asked Gorgias if Gorgias would be willing to teach someone justice who didn't know what the just was (482d). Callicles further finds fault with Polus' concession that "acting unjustly [is] more disgraceful than being treated unjustly" (482d). "It was agreeing to that," says Callicles, "which got him too, in his turn, tied up in knots and gagged by you during the argument, all because he was too embarrassed to say what he thought" (482e). It appears that Callicles will not shy away from making that same mistake, and he will say exactly what he thinks, seemingly overcoming feelings of shame or embarrassment. Peculiarly, just as Socrates was able to give an apparent account of Callicles' soul, so too is Callicles able to peer into Socrates' soul, and he attempts to provide an explanation of how Socrates consistently "tangles people up."

Callicles accuses Socrates of first not actually arguing with the end of truth in mind but rather merely to appeal to public opinion (482e-483a). In sum, he claims that Socrates “drag[s] the discussion down to commonplace appeals to public opinion – to things which are fine by convention, but not by nature” (482e). Thus, Socrates, according to Callicles, is not freely pursuing what is true but is in fact practicing his own form of dishonest rhetoric. He further accuses Socrates of variously using arguments based on convention or arguments based on nature to embarrass his interlocutors, switching based on what is being used by his interlocutor in a given instance. For Callicles holds that nature and convention – *physis* and *nomos* “are for the most part opposed to one another” (482e). Callicles affixes this as Socrates’ *modus operandi*:

So if someone, out of embarrassment, shrinks from saying what he thinks, he is bound to contradict himself. You’ve spotted this little trick too, and you’re quite unscrupulous about using it in argument. If people talk about the way things are by convention, you question them about the way things are in nature. If they talk about how things are in nature, then you ask them about how things are by convention. (483a)

He provides as his very example the last discussion that Socrates just had with Polus, where he noted Socrates asking, “Polus what was more disgraceful by convention,” but then Socrates “pursued the argument in terms of nature” (483a). “In nature,” according to Callicles, “anything is more disgraceful which is also worse – being treated unjustly, for example – though by convention acting unjustly is more disgraceful” (483a). Therefore, Polus should have stuck to the argument and not have permitted Socrates to perform his verbal entrapment. For as Callicles claims “a real man doesn’t have this happens to him,

this being treated unjustly” (483b). As a corollary, Callicles provides his own account of what makes life not worth living, which he understands to be allowing oneself to be treated unjustly: “It only happens to some slave for whom death is preferable to life – who when he is treated unjustly and downtrodden is incapable of defending himself or anyone else he cares for” (483b). This lack of manliness or a form of courage to defend oneself in the face of injustice is the criticism that Callicles will go on to develop against Socrates (484c-486d). Callicles sees Socrates as ripe for this sort of abuse at the hands of the many. In one sense then, Callicles too has a philanthropic goal, albeit misguided, for Socrates. He wants to help Socrates see the true value, or power rather, of rhetoric. Socrates, on the other hand, sees it as his mission to dissuade Callicles, Polus, and Gorgias from the life of flattery and to embrace the life of that which truly *is*, philosophy.

CHAPTER 15

CALLICLES' VIEW OF CONVENTIONAL AND NATURAL JUSTICE

Callicles sees himself as seeing through society and, as one who in some ways is like Socrates, in that he is necessarily at odds with the political community, but for altogether different reasons than Socrates. “If you ask me,” says Callicles, “the people who put the laws – conventions – in place are the weak, the many” (483b). The weak, according to Callicles have setup the rules of society for their benefit:

It is with an eye to themselves and their own advantage that they put the laws in place, praise the things they praise, and blame the things they blame. They intimidate the more forceful among mankind, the ones capable of getting the better of others, and to stop them getting the better of them, they say that getting the better of others is disgraceful and unjust, and that this is what injustice is – trying to get the better of everyone else. For themselves, I imagine they are well pleased if they can have an equal share, given their inferiority. (483b-c)

True justice according to Callicles is that which is in line with nature: “nature itself shows clearly what is just – for the better man to have more than the worse, and the more powerful more than the less powerful” (483d). Nature and history, Callicles claims, are on his side for “both in the animal world and among humans, in whole cities and races – that justice has been adjudged to be precisely this – the stronger ruling over, and getting the better of, the weaker” (484d). His examples include Xerxes’ campaigns against the Greeks and Darius’ campaign against the Scythians, both of which ended in failure though as Tom Griffith has pointed out in his translation (58n55). The very examples which Callicles raises appear to be abject failures, so while the powerful can engage in

such activities, the efficacy of their boundary crossing is in question, but as Socrates argues even if they had been successful the damage to their souls is immense (524e-525a). Nonetheless, people like Xerxes, as Callicles understands them, “act as they do in accordance with nature – the nature of the just” (483e). Callicles, similar to Gorgias in verbosity when Gorgias delivered his depiction of the enslaving powers of rhetoric (454e), continues his tirade against the just life when he tells Socrates,

Yes, by heaven, and in accordance with law – the law of nature, though possibly not with this law which we put in place. We take the best and most forceful among us – catching them young, like lions – mould them with spells and bewitchments, and enslave them. We tell them they should have what is equal, and that this is what is admirable and just. But as I see it, if a man is born with a strong enough nature, he shakes all this off, breaks through it, makes his escape from it. He tramples on our prescriptions, our charms, our spells, our laws which all run counter to nature, and rising up he stands revealed as our master, this slave, and there what is just in nature shines forth. (483e-484a)

Callicles here creates as it were his own allegory of the cave, albeit lacking the refined imagery that Socrates provides in the *Republic*. Callicles’ real man is able to leave behind the fictions of society and rise above what he sees as utter falsity, and, in sum, he escapes the cave without the assistance of others. Unlike his described man of superior standing, Callicles has not in fact left the cave, but he wants rather to become the leader of the cave. He has seen far enough into society, but perhaps he does not feel comfortable leaving it entirely if Socrates’ assessment of Callicles’ soul is accurate. The detail remains, if Socrates’ knowledge of Callicles is accurate, that Callicles in fact loves the

demos and wishes to actually garner the support and benefits of the so-called weak by nature for his own advantage as a politician. Perhaps Callicles is cunning enough to see to the foundations of society, but he does not feel strong enough to put his theory into practice. Instead, he will leach off of the vices of the democracy by means of flattering rhetoric.

Callicles further supports his claim to the powerful life by turning to myths. He sees in the story of Heracles and Geryon a parallel component to his theory of “the law of nature” for

Law, king of all the mortals and immortals...

With powerful hand makes the most violent just.

For this I call as witness Heracles,

Who in his labours never paid [for the cattle]. (484b)

Callicles acknowledges that his memory is a bit poor on the remainder of the poem, but the point he claims is nonetheless clear: “Anyways, he says that without paying for them, and without Geryon giving them to him, Heracles drove off Geryon’s cattle, in the belief that what is just by nature is for the cattle and other goods of those who are lesser and weaker to be the property of the one who is better and stronger” (484b-c). Callicles believes that Socrates too could come to this understanding if he merely removed the impediments from his path. The greatest of which that Callicles identifies is Socrates’ attachment to philosophy. In sum, Socrates must end his relationship with his greatest beloved.

CHAPTER 16

CALLICLES' VIEW OF PHILOSOPHY AND THE PHILOSOPHIC LIFE

Callicles views philosophy as a necessary stage in development towards rhetoric and the political life and not as an end in itself. In presenting these views, Callicles offers the greatest argument that Socrates faces against his contention in the *Apology* that the philosophic life as the best life is the only life worth living. Callicles sees philosophy as something that is merely “charming for anyone who gets a modest dose of it at the right age” (484c). In excess, however, and if it is pursued beyond an appropriate course, “it is the ruin of any human being” (484c). Philosophy, Callicles expounds, will ruin even the best nature, and “if he carries on with Philosophy to an advanced age, he will inevitably be without experience of all things you need to have experience of if you are going to be a man – fine, upstanding and well respected” (484d). In a strange turn of events, Callicles is now arguing for conventional morality and traditional values, “*kalon kagathon kai eudokimon esesthai andra.*” One will not become a perfect gentleman if one studies philosophy for too long, but has not Callicles just brought into question the very value of the role of the gentleman, a deeply convention laden concept? In sum, Callicles is deeply confused about his own relationship with the *polis*.

Strikingly, Callicles makes several prophetic claims that Socrates will be laughed at if he in fact ever tries to engage in political action due to his overall ignorance of the world. This fulfilled during his trial, where Socrates has to repeatedly quell the laughter and outrage of his fellow Athenians based on the apparently absurd claims that he makes. In telling Socrates this, Callicles seems to hope to warn him of his own deficiencies in an attempt to make Socrates better.

Philosophers are without experience of the laws of the city, of the language required in dealings with people, whether private or public, of human pleasures and desires – in fact, altogether ignorant of the ways of the world. The result is that when they enter upon any private or public undertaking, they make themselves a laughing-stock – just as I imagine politicians do when they in their turn enter upon your lot’s discussion and ways of talking. (484d-e)

The key aspect of Socrates’ ignorance, as Callicles expresses, it is that Socrates has neglected to become familiar with “human pleasures and desires.” These pleasures cannot be studied as such by philosophy, and, without direct contact with them, Callicles thinks that Socrates will be unable to bridge the difference between himself and the many (*hoi polloi*). Callicles generally draws out the incompatibility between philosophy and politics, as politicians make themselves seem foolish when interacting with philosophers.

Callicles though sees Socrates’ preference for philosophy as a part of human nature for according to him and Euripides, “where each person shines...this is what he strives for,” “keeping the main part of the day for things / In which he’s at his best” (484e). Socrates prefers philosophy not for its own sake implies Callicles, but because Socrates is good at it and finds it pleasurable, which also happens to be the reason that Socrates praises the philosophic life. Callicles supplies for Socrates a hedonistic foundation for his love of philosophy. We love that which we understand and enjoy that which we understand. Thus, Socrates turns to philosophy because it is pleasurable to him. For, as Callicles argues, a man praises things he likes “thinking that in this way he is praising himself” (485a)., Callicles sees Socrates’ love of philosophy not as a love which is unbiased, but as an

example of a love of one's own. It is not the pure love of wisdom that Socrates is expressing, but a love of himself.

Callicles instead recommends having “a share of both” philosophy and politics via rhetoric (485a). Just as there are appropriate developmental stages for children to be engaged in such as lispings or playing, says Callicles, given their respective ages which engaged in at a young age would be “charming,” but which continued in would be seen as “ludicrous and unmanly” and even worth beating a man (485b-c). So too, says Callicles, is philosophy a charming activity for a youth to be engaged in, but only for one's early education. Those who do not engage in philosophy at all Callicles finds “unfree and unlikely to ever expect any admirable or noble achievement” from (485c). Callicles' view of philosophy is ultimately one of utility, and those who persist in it, do so to their own detriment:

But when I see an older person still going on with philosophy, and not giving it up, then in my view, Socrates, what this man needs is a good beating. As I said just now, what happens to a person like this, however able he may be, is that he becomes unmanly, avoiding the city centre and the meeting places in which, says the poet, men win distinction. He disappears from view, and spends the rest of his life whispering in a corner with three or four adolescents, without ever giving voice to anything free or great, or effective. (485d-e)

The poet Callicles references is of course Homer, and the line he partially quotes, in the *agora* where men win distinction – “*andras ariprepeis*,” comes from Phoenix's speech in the *Iliad* when he is attempting to persuade Achilles to return to the fight and accept Agamemnon's gift, thereby also accepting his subordination to Agamemnon (XI.441).

Socrates then is placed in the role of Achilles, whereas Callicles takes on the bearing of Phoenix perhaps sent on a mission from Agamemnon-Gorgias. In another peculiar parallel with the *Apology*, Socrates will reprise his role as Achilles and offers himself up as the new Achilles, an Athenian Achilles — perhaps not so subtly displacing the Phthyan Achilles in his defense speeches (28b-d).

Callicles has philanthropic motives for interacting with Socrates, and he attempts to deliver his advice by imitating the speech of one brother to another, for he claims to have Socrates' good in mind, feeling friendly towards him (485e): "And yet, my dear Socrates – and don't be angry with me, it's for your own good I'm saying this – don't you think it's a disgrace to be in the state I think you're in, along with the rest of those who spend their whole time pressing on with philosophy?" (486a). Callicles will be Zethus to Socrates' Amphion. Role playing characters from Euripides' lost play *Antiope*, Callicles offers Socrates this rousing short speech:

Socrates, you pay no attention to the things you ought to attend to. Fate has given you a natural nobility of soul, yet you present yourself to the world in the guise of an adolescent. You couldn't make a proper speech in the halls of justice; you're never going to come up with the plausible or the persuasive, or put forward a bold proposal in support of someone else. (486a)

Callicles' criticisms of Socrates assume motives which are not present within Socrates' soul as he expresses himself. He does not seem to have a desire for glory or honor. Callicles though does not seem to understand this, and, therefore, he does not understand the allure of the philosophic life. From Callicles' perspective, Socrates is unmanly and ultimately

unable to defend himself in the *polis*. His dedication to philosophy has left him open to the gravest of fates:

As things stand now, if someone seized hold of you or one of your kind, and carted you off to prison, claiming you were acting unjustly when you weren't acting unjustly you know you'd have no way of helping yourself. You'd go dizzy, and stand there gawping, with no idea what to say. You'd be had up in court, find yourself acting some altogether contemptible and vicious accuser, and if he chose to demand the death penalty for you, you'd be put to death. (486a-b)

Callicles challenges Socrates to explain how it could be wise to pursue something which necessarily makes one weaker. The climax of Callicles' attack against philosophy is as follows:

How can this be wisdom, Socrates – 'an art which takes an able man and makes him worse', with no power to help himself, or save himself or anyone else from the greatest dangers? All he can do is watch his whole property being plundered by his enemies, and live in the city as an absolute nobody. With someone like this, to put it crudely, you can give him a knuckle sandwich and get away with it. I mean it, listen to me. Stop this questioning people, and 'practice the music of affairs' – practice where 'for wisdom you will get repute'; 'to others leave these subtleties' – call them follies, call them nonsenses – which will 'bring you a life in empty halls'. Model yourself, not on men who ask these nitpicking questions, but on those who possess life and reputation and many other good things besides. (486b-d)

Callicles calls for his own complete revolution of Socrates' life. He sees Socrates as possibly being one of the natural lions who has been tamed, and he wants to 'free' Socrates

from his shackles. Socrates' soul is "naturally noble," but he does not use it for any true advantage as Callicles can calculate it.

To Callicles' assault against philosophy, Socrates does not initially make a direct response. Socrates instead hypothesizes that perhaps Callicles is in fact a godsend – he is a human touchstone who can reveal to Socrates what the quality of his soul is. If in fact Socrates has a golden soul, Callicles can be that which reveals this truth to Socrates. With this Calliclesian touchstone in his possession, Socrates could in some way reach certainty: "I could apply my soul to it, to see if the stone agreed that my soul had been well cared for; that way I could finally be sure that I was in satisfactory shape and that I had no need of any further test" (486d). Just as Socrates will go on to claim that he himself is a gift of the gods for the benefit of Athens at 30e in the *Apology*, he now claims that Callicles is a gift of the gods for his own benefit: "I think that," Socrates says to Callicles, "in finding you I have found a godsend of just that kind" (486e). In talking with Callicles, Callicles will benefit Socrates, but not in the way that Callicles had intended. Socrates further clarifies why his discussion with Callicles is in fact the most important discussion possible:

Of all possible enterprises this enquiry is the finest, Callicles – though you criticized me for it. It's about the kind of person a man should be, be he older or younger, what he should pursue, and up to what point. For my part, if there is in some way in which I am not doing the right thing in my own life, then believe me, I am not doing wrong on purpose, but as a result of my own stupidity. (487e-488a)

It is not just the most important discussion, but it is the most important 'enterprise.' There is seemingly nothing more important than determining the right way to live according to

Socrates. Socrates establishes here what he will again affirm in the *Apology*: the life dedicated to discussing virtue is the best possible life for a human being (38a).

Socrates continues to seek to make Callicles better by examining Callicles' understanding of justice. Callicles' sense of justice as retold by Socrates appears in the following formulation: "That he who is more powerful should carry off by force the things that belong to those who are worse, and that the superior should have more than the inferior? Am I remembering it right? You're not saying justice is anything other than that, are you?" (488b). Callicles affirms that this is in fact his conception of justice: "No that's what I said. And what I still say" (488b). He does not see Socrates' restatement as being in any way inaccurate. Socrates attempts to clarify his own understanding of Callicles' reasoning, by asking if the terms "more powerful, stronger and better were the same thing" (488d), or if in fact it is "possible to be better, but less powerful and weaker, or more powerful but more wicked" (488c). Callicles affirms that they are in fact the same, claiming that the powerful, better, and the stronger reside in the same place at the same time and appear to be coterminous. Socrates begins to prod at Callicles' understanding of stronger by raising the following question: "And in nature, are the many more powerful than the single individual?" If the many are more powerful, then they must, by Callicles' own statement, be better (488e). Socrates seemingly refutes Callicles' conception of 'stronger.'

Socrates then attempts to improve Callicles' conception of the good life, for Callicles claims that "the person who is going to live in the right way should allow his own desires to be as great as possible, without restraining them" (491e). Prior to that statement, Callicles had denigrated moderation as a form of foolishness and furthermore a limiting of one's freedom, for according to him, how "can a human be happy if he is a slave to anyone

at all?” (491e). While Socrates’ view sounds somewhat paradoxical in that we set a master over ourselves to live freely in the end, Socrates’ view is that one who is moderate is “his own master, ruling the pleasures and desires within himself” (491d). Both Callicles and Socrates offer competing claims to the good life. Socrates develops his account further on in the dialogue with Callicles (500a-505b) and all the more so in the *Apology*.

Turning back to Callicles, however, Callicles’ further account of the ideal life, albeit in a crude form, echoes the description of the tyrannical soul as described by Socrates in Book VIII of the *Republic*. Callicles states that

the person who is going to live in the right way should allow his own desires [*epithumias*] to be as great as possible, without restraining them. And when they are as great as can be, he should be capable of using his courage [*andreian*] and understanding [*phronesin*] in their service, giving them full measure of whatever it is, on any particular occasion, his desire is for. (491e-492a)

Whereas in the *Republic*, Socrates describes the genesis of the tyrant as taking place when desire, *eros*, takes over the soul, referring to love as a “winged drone” (573a), and “if it finds in the man any opinions or desires accounted good and still admitting shame, it slays them and pushes them out of him until it purges him of *moderation* and fills him with madness brought in from abroad” (573a-b). Furthermore, the tyrannical-souled man

will stick at no terrible murder, or food, or deed. Rather, love lives like a tyrant within him in all anarchy and lawlessness; and being a monarch, will lead the man whom it controls, as though he were a city, to every kind of daring that will produce wherewithal for it and the noisy crowd around it—one part of which bad company

caused to come in from outside; the other part was from within and was set loose and freed by his own bad character. (574e-575a)

Furthermore, Socrates argues “those parts of [the soul] that are most decent [will] be slaves while a small part, the most depraved and maddest [will] be [the] master” (577d). The tyrant’s soul is articulated by Socrates as having the basest part, the appetitive, ruling over the spirited and calculating parts, the noblest. Thus “the soul that is under a tyranny will least do what it wants—speaking of the soul as a whole. Always forcibly drawn by a gadfly, it will be full of confusion and regret” (577e). Socrates, though, was only able to come to that conclusion by making an analogy, not a rigorous proof, saying, “doesn’t a city that is slave and under a tyranny least do what it wants?” (577d). The premise that his conclusion is based on can be possibly compelling, but not ultimately persuasive. Finally, Socrates claims that

the real tyrant is, even if he doesn’t seem so to someone, in truth a real slave to the greatest fawning and slavery, and a flatterer of the most worthless men; and with his desires getting no kind of satisfaction, he shows that he is most in need of the most things and poor in truth, if one knows how to look at a soul as a whole. (579d-e)

The key difference between Callicles’ statement on the ideal life and Socrates’ portrayal of the tyrant is the presence or absence of satisfaction of the desires. Socrates sees the tyrannical life as ultimately leading to insatiable desires: “the tyrannic soul is necessarily always poverty-ridden and insatiable” (578a). Callicles, on the other hand, is convinced that these desires can be fulfilled, but only by the “those people who are by nature better” (492a).

Those who cannot fulfill their desires, Callicles asserts, constitute the greatest part of the population, and they praise “moderation and justice because of their own lack of manliness” (492b). The many, Callicles’ puts forward, “condemn [the naturally better] as a cloak for their own powerlessness” (492a). But those who are in the best position to be in power “right from the beginning” by being “sons of kings” or those who “have the natural ability to win some position of authority for themselves,” Callicles asks, “what could in truth be more disgraceful or worse than moderation and justice” for those kinds of people (492b)? In attempting to articulate a suitable answer for Callicles, Socrates does reveal his intention in persuading Callicles and in interacting with him, which could be the same reason for interacting with Gorgias and Polus as well. He wishes to change Callicles’ mind and have him “choose the ordered life, a life where what you have at any particular moment is adequate and sufficient, in preference to the insatiable, unrestrained life” (493d). The life that Gorgias seems to instruct others to desire and what he actually promises to educate most students — in contrast to what he felt it was necessary to say to Socrates that he in fact would be willing to teach justice if he received a pupil ignorant in such matters (460a) — is in fact the insatiable life. Gorgias understands this life as the life which utilizes persuasion to get what one wants. When Socrates pushes Gorgias to explain just what precisely the “great good” that he professes to know, Gorgias claims that it is unqualified persuasion:

Persuasion, I would say. The ability to persuade by means of speeches, whether jurymen on a jury, councilors in the council-chamber assembly members in the assembly – or any other meeting which is a meeting of citizens. In fact, by this power you will make a slave of the doctor, a slave of the fitness expert. And for this

businessman, it will become clear that he is not in business for his own benefit, but for someone else's – yours, since you are the one who has the ability to speak and persuade large groups of people. (452e)

Callicles attempts to live the life that Gorgias describes as ostensibly available to one who masters rhetoric. It is the life of one who commands and orders – similar in kind to the tyrannical life. Socrates seems to doubt that he can change Callicles' mind on this matter, and he questions Callicles rather bluntly by asking him outright who he thinks lives a happier life: “Do you think those whose life is ordered are happier than those who are unrestrained? Or can I tell you any number of stories like this without you changing your mind in the least?” (493d). To which Callicles affirms that he is steadfast in his belief: “That's much closer to the truth, Socrates” (493d). It is peculiar that Socrates does not offer a significant refutation of Callicles' view of the best life, but he only instead offers “stories” or fables, literally *muthologō* (493d), or perhaps persuasive arguments.

Socrates presses on, asking if the life of unrestrained sexual pleasure would not be the most pleasurable, Callicles asks Socrates if he is “ashamed to drag the discussion down to such depths” (484e). Socrates perhaps jokingly acknowledged before that his use of shame and embarrassment were perhaps on purpose: “Yes, Callicles, that's how I unnerved Gorgias and Polus, and made them embarrassed [*aischunesthai*]. But you're a brave chap, you won't be unnerved or get embarrassed.” (494d) Through this digression though, Socrates is able to pry from Callicles the admission that the pleasant and the good are not in fact the same and that the pleasurable things should be done for the sake of the good things (500a).

CHAPTER 17

SOCRATES: THE TRUE ORATOR AND TRUE POLITICAL SCIENTIST

At the precise midpoint of their conversation together, 500a-505b, Socrates aids Callicles in distinguishing two kinds of lives. The significance of this distinction cannot be more important for Socrates, as it reflects the difference of the possible lives he articulated at 500c:

You can see that nothing could be of more importance to anyone of the slightest intelligence than the subject we are discussing, which is this: how should we live our lives? There's the life you are urging upon me, doing the things a real man does – speaking before the people, practising rhetoric, engaging in politics the way you people now engage in it. Is that the way to live? Or should it be this life spent in philosophy? (500c)

The distinction that Socrates helps Callicles to understand becomes the foundation for his method of speaking in the *Apology*. It is the moral and intellectual foundation of his rhetoric of improvement. Socrates brings to Callicles the awareness that there is a difference between the pleasurable and the good, and that, furthermore, “there is a practice and activity concerned with the acquisition of each of them” (500d). So, we understand the pursuit of the good as separate from the pursuit of the pleasant. The pursuit of the pleasant, whether it is of bodily matters or matters of the soul, is sycophancy (501c). Socrates places in this category arts like music, such as “playing the reed pipe,” “playing the kithara in competitions,” and the performance of choruses and dithyrambic poetry (501e). Even tragedy, Socrates argues, is in its basic form designed to “give the audience what they want” (502b). Poetry in all forms is “some kind of popular

oratory” (502d), which further clarifies why the poets perhaps are unable to explain their poetry in a meaningful way to Socrates in the *Apology* (22a-c). As a corollary, Socrates wants Callicles to state whether or not the rhetoric that appears in popular assemblies works with the same end in mind, pleasure, or if it has the aim “to make the citizens as good as possible” (502e). Callicles is puzzled, as he has heard that there are “those who say what they say out of a concern for the citizens, and there are also the kind of people you are talking about [who say what they think the people want to hear] (503a).

Socrates take this opportunity to develop his vision of an ideal, ennobling rhetoric, and in contrast to the sycophantic rhetoric,

The other would be admirable, bringing it about that the souls of the citizens are as good as possible, and battling to say what is best, regardless of whether it makes it more pleasing or unpleasant to those listening to them. (503a)

This ennobling rhetoric is precisely the form of rhetoric that Socrates uses. It is speech aimed at moving the soul of the individual towards the good without concern for its pleasing or unpleasant affects. Just as the ideal doctor would attempt to foster a good condition in the body by promoting health and strength, Socrates attempts to make those he interacts with more lawful in the greatest sense of developing “justice and self-control” in their souls (504d). The process can at times be painful as significant evils must be removed and the soul must be disciplined away from its bad desires towards good ones. As Socrates argued earlier, it is ignorance which keeps those who live in a poor condition from seeking a better one (479b-c).

Socrates goes on to talk of the ennobling art of the good orator, or the true politician, which gives us a view of what Socrates understands his own mission to be:

[Justice and self-control] are the things our orator will have in view, then – our scientific, good orator – as he applies to souls the words he speaks, the actions he performs, the gifts he gives, or takes away anything he may take away. He will be forever thinking about how he can breed justice in the souls of the citizens, and get rid of injustice, how he can breed restraint and get rid of indiscipline, how he can breed virtue in general and get vice to depart. (504d-e)

Socrates, in attempting to fulfill his role as the good orator, who does not engage with the multitude in large populations as it is not possible to engage with the many on matters of the greatest importance in such a way, has made himself hated for exposing the faults and disciplining the souls of his fellow Athenians. Socrates though in arguing for the disciplined life, makes himself hated by Athens. It is the greatest irony that the greatest benefactor is viewed as the greatest pest. He is simultaneously the true politician and the galling gadfly. On top of this, Callicles is presented with a further argument for why the Socratic, true rhetoric of philosophy is superior to the Gorgian rhetoric of sycophancy aiming at acquiring power after power.

According to the argument Socrates sustains with himself from 506c-507a, only the “self-controlled soul is good” (507a). This is in part because only someone possessing self-control, *sophrosunē*, can be happy (507d). Thus, only one seeking out wisdom, the philosopher, can truly attain happiness. The life which deliberately sets out to seek pleasure, the undisciplined life, will not lead to true happiness, but, rather, it will lead to “an evil without end” as it will be necessary to constantly seek to let the desires grow as large as possible (507e). It is deeply ironic that Socrates’ attempt to help make others virtuous, self-controlled, and wise (which in turn would make them happy if they were

able to attain these goals) in fact makes Socrates hated and the object of anger of nearly his entire community. For Socrates, the art of refutation is a purging and healing process which in turn makes the individual better, and he contrasts his view of it with Callicles' view whose response to correction and exposure of his lack of understanding stands in for all public-minded individuals: "And if you prove me completely wrong," Socrates assures Callicles, "I won't get angry with you, as you did with me, but have you put on record as my greatest benefactor" (506c). If Socrates could persuade Callicles to take up the philosophic life as an orator for moderation, self-control, and virtue, he could have an incredibly powerful ally in saving the soul of the city, and this is perhaps another reason for Socrates' continued desire to interact with Callicles long after Callicles has lost interest in the conversation. Socrates himself chose to live and philosophize by doing good in private, avoiding political matters. By his own reckoning, he would have perished early on in a purely public career (31d). Had he not maintained himself as a private individual he could not have accomplished any good for "if someone who really fights for the just is going to preserve himself even for a short time, it is necessary for him to lead a private rather than a public life" (31e-32a). One wonders then if Socrates is setting Callicles up to die by attempting to persuade him to engage in oratory aimed at the good. For as Socrates says in the *Apology* to the jury, "there is no human being who will preserve his life if he genuinely opposes either you or any other multitude and prevents many unjust and unlawful things from happening in the city" (31e). Perhaps, though, Callicles could have the right aptitude to bypass this fate.

At 515a, Callicles, Socrates asserts, is preparing to "take part in political life," and therefore the dialogue gains a greater sense of urgency as the decisions under discussion

are significantly less hypothetical than real, for Callicles is seemingly on the verge of making his debut. As a younger man, Callicles has criticized an older man who acts younger by remaining in the grip of philosophy, leaving the audience with an image of Socrates amongst a gaggle of followers, spending “the rest of his life whispering in a corner with three or four adolescents, without ever giving voice to anything free, or great, or effective” (485d-e). Callicles criticizes Socrates for not truly engaging in politics as understood by Callicles. Socrates pushes back against Callicles’ self-driven certainty by asking him “...who has become a fine upstanding person because of Callicles?” (515a). This is Socrates’ understanding of the real political art, for the truly noble task is engaged in “making the things we are taking care of – it may be the body, it may be the soul – as good as possible” (513e). Socrates asserts that Callicles is going into politics in a shameful state himself with a view other than thinking of how “the citizens may be as good as possible,” which Socrates claims is what the true statesman ought to have always as his goal (515c). Socrates reveals that the reason behind this is Callicles’ love of the Athenian *demos*. He does not want to better the *demos*, but, rather, to flatter it. When Callicles acknowledges that he thinks Socrates has reasoned properly yet remains himself unconvinced, he expresses a feeling common to many of Socrates’ interlocutors: “I’m sure you’re right, Socrates – in some sense which is beyond me. But I still feel what most people feel: I simply don’t believe you” (513c). Socrates reveals why Callicles feels this internal contradiction: “That’s because you have the love of the *demos* in your soul, Callicles. That’s what I’m up against” (513c). This is in part due to the soul-deforming effects of the sycophantic approach that Callicles has adopted. In order to be successful for the long term in any regime, Socrates asserts that one must be like the ruling party:

Is it by turning himself into an exact copy of the political system in force where he is living? In which case, you should now be making yourself as much like the Athenian *demos* as you can, if you are going to endear yourself to it and have great power in the city. See if that is in your best interest and mine....And if you think that anyone in the world is going to pass on to you some art or science of the kind which will make it so that you have great power in this city – whether for better or for worse – without turning yourself into a copy of its political system, then in my view, Callicles, you are making a big mistake. It's not just a question of mimicking these people. You have to be like them in your very nature, if you are to make any real progress towards friendship with the Athenian *demos*. (512e-513b)

Callicles prides himself on being beyond the common morality and having been clever enough to see through common notions of justice, moderation, temperance, and the like. In order to be successful, though, he must become like the people in his very nature. To be friends with those in power in a democracy, one must be viewed as their equal, as Socrates claims, and not better or worse than them. Thus, the clever Callicles must not appear so wise if he wishes to be truly successful amongst the *demos*. Socrates delivers a devastating truth to Callicles concerning the nature of persuasive political rhetoric in general: “That’s why it’s the person who will make you most like these people – he’s the person who will make you into a politician and rhetorician in the way you want to be a politician. All groups of people take pleasure in speeches which conform to their own ethos, and are offended by an ethos which isn’t theirs” (513b-c). The only way to become appreciated by the people is to flatter the people. Telling the truth or attempting to make

them better by changing their character results in shame and anger, which are then directed against the speaker. Furthermore, there is no point, Socrates argues, “in bestowing any other benefit – if the character of those who are going to be given large sums of money, or authority over others, or any other power at all, is not fine and upstanding,” for in such instances the citizens would be made more dangerous as they become more powerful and thus more able to harm their own souls to a greater degree by committing acts of injustice (514a). This becomes Socrates’ “principle” concerning politics: the soul of the citizen should be made as good as possible before anything else should be attempted. How then do the traditional statesmen compare?

Socrates attempts to remove from Callicles’ sphere of admiration statesmen popularly thought of as excellent. Pericles, Cimon, Themistocles, and Miltiades are brought up initially as examples by Callicles, and Socrates argues that they in fact practiced neither the true rhetoric of making citizens better, nor did they fully practice the sycophantic rhetoric which Gorgias teaches and Callicles imbibes (517a). Not only are these great individuals of Athens not practitioners of the true rhetorical art, but no one also currently practices this art as well, for Socrates admits to Callicles, “We don’t know anyone in this city who has been a good man when it comes to politics” (516e-517a). Callicles attempts to form a rebuttal by arguing that no contemporary Athenian “has ever come anywhere near achieving the kinds of things those people – take any of them you like – have achieved” (517a). Socrates admits that on this ground he is not criticizing them “as servants of the city” — for he even goes so far as to say, “I think they were much better servants than the people now, and more capable of providing the city with things it wanted” (517b). But Socrates does not see the ability of the traditionally-viewed

statesmen of providing the citizens with what they want as being the end of politics.

While they may have been better procurers than Socrates' contemporary leaders of Athens, this does not make them good politicians in the Socratic sense. Socrates' view of the good citizen and good leader is expressed in the following terms:

If it's a question of changing desires rather than giving in to them, of coaxing and compelling in the direction which would lead to the citizens becoming better people, then there was effectively no difference between those people and these.

And yet that is the sole function of a good citizen. (517b-c)

The two sets of people Socrates refers to are his modern politicians and those of former times who are thought to be excellent statesmen. Socrates has demonstrated how the former statesmen left Athens more corrupt on the whole. While they themselves did not always feel the repercussion of their actions, later generations must face the consequences and the *demos* hold them accountable for the mistakes of the past, whereas "those earlier people, the ones responsible for their ills, they will praise to the skies" (518d). Socrates summarizes the accomplishments of the aforementioned group of four statesmen as consisting of "ships and walls and dockyards and all those kinds of things," but on a larger level the greatest accomplishments of these men allowed Athens to survive, but they neglected, Socrates implies, to concern themselves with the condition of the souls of the Athenians. Their accomplishments enabled the Athenians to live, but they did not consider if they ought to live, as they would be living with corrupted bodies and souls (512a-b).

CHAPTER 18

CALLICLES' CONFUSION ON SOPHISTRY AND ORATORY

Callicles sees sophists and orators in two different lights, and this is one further moment where Socrates attempts to aid Callicles in making finer distinctions. Just how different is sophistry from oratory and rhetoric? His statements about sophistry depict it negatively: “But what is there to be said about people worth nothing at all?” (520a). Socrates in response explains how he finds a great affinity between sophists and politicians, for they both claim to make those they lead better. Whereas the sophist teaches “human goodness” (519c) and the politician claims that the “people shall be as good as possible” under his care, they “then turn round and accuse it, when the mood takes them, of being most wicked” (520a). Callicles, though, believes that orators are on another level from and are higher in dignity than sophists entirely; however, Socrates thinks they are really the same thing: “Bless you, a sophist and an orator are the same thing, or as near as makes no difference” (520a). Socrates’ willingness to group sophists together with orators is rather interesting, as he goes on to detail how in fact the sophist’s art is actually better in some degree than the orator’s art. Recalling the distinction made back at 465c, Socrates explains how he views them in comparison to the true sciences of improvement: “the sophist’s art is a finer thing than rhetoric to the same degree that the legislative art is finer than the judicial, and the physical trainer’s art than the medical” (520b). Socrates continues by establishing a separate yet related affinity between politicians, sophists, and teachers. Politicians, sophists, and teachers of any sort are seemingly incapable of criticizing those whom they lead or instruct, for the criticism redounds back on them:

I thought that political leaders and sophists were actually the only ones not in a position to criticize this creature of their own education for behaving badly towards them, without also in the same breath accusing themselves of bringing no benefit to the people they claim to be benefitting. (520b)

The repercussions of criticizing reveal both a lack of success and a possible lack of knowledge. Thus the sophist who argues in public that his students have wronged him present a contradiction and reveal his own deficiency, for how could he be harmed by those who “have become good and just, who have had the injustice in them removed by their teacher and who have acquired justice?” — how can they “be acting unjustly on account of something which they do not have?” (519d). The sophist ought to feel shame for living such a contradictory life, and all the more so for the orator, who lives in the shadow of the sophist.

CHAPTER 19

SOCRATES ON SHAME AND ANGER

Socrates makes both Gorgias and Polus feel ashamed for their positions, and he attempts to shame Callicles as well for the position that he too holds. Why does Socrates seem to rely on shame as a means of refutation? What makes shame more effective than pure logical refutation? Instead of continuing to show Callicles that he contradicts himself, Socrates instead seems to offer him key *muthologoi* (the two versions of the jar myth and the eschatological myth of the final judgment). Is shame particularly effective at getting those who feel it to become self-conflicted?

What does shame rely on? It seems that shame requires a sense of justice and unity which it would be improper to violate. When one is made aware of one's imperfection or shortcoming, the pang of shame is significant. Callicles rails against Socrates' use of conventional morality to hem in both Gorgias and Polus, and he claims that both were too ready to consent to common morality. He claims to be beyond and above this morality, but is he? Socrates was able to show that Polus himself has a hidden attachment to the love of the noble when Polus agreed that acting unjustly is more disgraceful than being treated unjustly (475d-e). Polus further agreed that "...injustice and acting unjustly are the greatest evil" (479c). Callicles too feels the sting of annoyance when Socrates reveals the kind of life his arguments allow for (494e). But he also reveals a sense of justice when Socrates agrees that it is possible for a tyrant to put a just person to death "if he feels like it, but it will be someone bad putting a fine, upstanding individual to death" (511b) — to which Callicles responds, but isn't "that what's so upsetting about it?" (511b). Callicles then is not above justice or empathy. He feels here

the anguish of witnessing injustice and expresses regret at the sense of being powerless to stop it. Callicles does not want to see Socrates suffer at the hands of the many. Socrates succeeds, albeit minimally, in improving and revealing to Callicles aspects of his better nature.

CHAPTER 20

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON PLATO

In discussing the happiness of tyrants with Polus, Socrates acknowledges the inborn limits of his own conversational approach in responding to Polus' desire to "ask any of these people here" to respond to the claim that the tyrannical life is not a happy life (474b). Socrates exposes his own acknowledged ignorance when it comes to practical political affairs in his response:

I'm not one of your politicians, Polus. Last year I was chosen to serve on the council, and when it was my tribe's turn to provide the executive committee, and it was up to me to put something to the vote, I made a bit of a fool of myself by not knowing how to put to the vote. So don't now tell me to put it to the vote with these people here. No, if that's the best you can do in the way of proving me wrong, then do as I suggested a moment ago. Let me have a turn, and then you can see what I think a proof should be like. I only know how to produce one witness for the things I'm saying – and that's the person I'm actually having the discussion with. I've no time for the many. But if it's one person, then I do know how to put it to a vote. As for the many, I can't even begin to have a discussion with them. So see if you'll be willing in your turn to give to me a chance to prove you wrong, by answering the questions which are put to you. (473e-474b)

The account Socrates provides here is the very account that Callicles will seemingly mock him with for making himself a laughingstock in public at 484d-e. At the conclusion of his attestation, Socrates explains why his science of politics, of being a judge and examiner of the souls of others, does not work with a multitude. It is impossible to have a

discussion with a group. How then can the Socratic science of politics, with its focus on improving the souls of the interlocutors, be successful if it is seemingly impossible to scale the activity up to the level of the *polis*? Perhaps Plato's own endeavor of creating and distributing his dialogues of Socrates is an attempt to broaden the efficacy of the Socratic method by both making Socrates immortal through text, but also able to reach more individuals through an imitation of the best kind of conversations. For this method to work, the reader would not only need to read the text but also feel the gaze of Socrates upon his own soul. The reader must think as Socrates thinks, or what is more likely, acknowledge that he thinks at times as Plato's interlocutors think while attempting to root out his own ill-begotten beliefs as Socrates examines the souls of his interlocutors. The dialogues then, read in an active way, ought to be soul-shaping and soul-purifying. This is Socrates' greatest civic endeavor as it is a work for all *poleis* at all times:

And on the other hand, if I say that this even happens to be a very great good for a human being—to make speeches every day about virtue and the other things about which you hear me conversing and examining both myself and others—and that the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being, you will be persuaded by me still less when I say these things. This is the way it is, as I affirm, men; but to persuade you is not easy. (38a)

REFERENCES

- Diduch, Paul J., and Michael P. Harding, editors. *Socrates in the Cave: On the Philosopher's Motive in Plato*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.
- Homer. *Iliad*. Translated by A. T. Murray and William F. Wyatt, Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Plato. *Gorgias, Menexenus, Protagoras*. Edited by Malcolm Schofield. Translated by Tom Griffith, Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Plato. *Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias*. Translated by Walter R. M. Lamb, Harvard Univ. Press, 1925.
- Plato. *Socrates and the Sophists: Plato's Protagoras, Euthydemus, Hippias Major and Cratylus*. Translated by Joe Sachs, Focus Publishing/ R. Pullins Co., 2011.
- Plato. *The Republic of Plato*. Translated by Allan Bloom, Basic Books, 2016.
- Stauffer, Devin. "Socrates and Calicles: A Reading of Plato's 'Gorgias.'" *The Review of Politics*, vol. 64, no. 4, 2002, pp. 627–657. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1408743>.
- West, Thomas G., and Grace Starry West, translators. *Four Texts on Socrates*. Cornell University Press, 1998.
- Zuckert, Catherine H. *Plato's Philosophers the Coherence of the Dialogues*. The University of Chicago Press, 2009.